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THE OPALESCENT PARROT

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Essays by

ALFRED NOYES

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THE OPALESCENT PARROT

M. BAUDELAIRE WHITEWASHES LONGFELLOW

ONCE upon a time, my little ones, there was a be-yewtiful parrot. He had long green wings, eyes like rubies, with grey wrinkles round them, and a crest that looked as if it had been dyed in the blood of Prester John. But, when he ruffled his feathers, he looked like an opalescent mist of emotions. So he was called the Opalescent Parrot. He was hatched by the Orinoco, where the Spanish bells go *ping-pang-pong* when it is time for the alligators to eat another explorer; but there must have been a conventional strain in his blood, for he actually cracked his shell at the very moment in 1837 when the Archbishop, Dr. Howley, entered Kensington Palace, and therefore it is only right that the misguided bird should be called a VICTORIAN parrot.

Now we all know what VICTORIAN means, don't we, little ones? If you have forgotten, you may still hear them talking about it in those truly advanced circles of the United States, where new and therefore advanced critics teach still newer and therefore still more advanced children of genius to say "*complex—complex—complex*" until they say it all together, and in exactly the same way, throughout the length and breadth of their land—which is the right meaning of "original" and "unconventional," isn't it, little ones? For we all know that it's absurd to waste time in defending or developing those steadfast things which are not of to-day or yesterday, but are merely true for ever. Those things are like the poor, aren't they? I mean they will be there to-morrow, when the effect of the cocktails has worn off. So let's all be original and unanimous, and fuddle what is left of our wits with the latest depreciation of Longfellow by an American whose first name is Herbert. We will call him simply Herbert, because his own delicate shrinking from the contamination of a subject so Victorian is so intense that he cannot bring himself to use the poet's name. He is a useful example merely because he has written a completely typical book about Longfellow. He calls him "A Victorian

American " in his main title, and throughout the book he invariably speaks of him with a coy facetiousness as " Henry." Herbert, moreover, says that Longfellow was not perhaps the American Tennyson ; but he might be described as " our late dear Queen." This is to help the reader to understand that Herbert is a kind of great, big, lovely, red-blooded, he-man, hundred-per-cent. American imitation of Mr. Lytton Strachey, although his main desire, he says, is that American writers should be " autochthonous." Herbert is autochthonous enough. He resembles Mr. Lytton Strachey about as closely as a pumpkin resembles a violin. But the soul of the pumpkin is ambitious ; and in Herbert's last chapter, on the death of Longfellow, there is a quite serious attempt to reproduce the effect of Mr. Strachey's wistful picture of the dying Queen. Hence the naïve preparatory comparison.

Now if you have forgotten all that " Victorian " once meant to us, little ones, and what it still means in the advanced circles of America, you must remember that nobody could be saved intellectually unless he held that the age of " our late dear Queen " was immeasurably beneath his respect in every way. (When you say " our late dear Queen " you must remember to sniff, little

ones, and you must do it all together, or you mightn't be thought to be *quite* original.) Great poets who knew that minor artistic subtlety and strength of character are two very different matters had seen in her a simple-minded woman to whom they could give at least as much respect as to the essentially shallow *cocottes* who rule the "advanced" circles of this chaotic hour. But what shall remove from the soul of Victoria's age the indelible stain of its vulgar association with Tennyson, whose "In Memoriam" was so smooth and facile (for he had worked nineteen years on it)? What shall cleanse her age of those blood-splashes from the pomegranates of Browning, whose works were so rugged and difficult (because he didn't spend so much time on them)? What shall atone for Darwin, who told us that we were animals (as if we hadn't discovered that for ourselves)? And who shall reconcile us to Carlyle and Newman, who by different roads desired to lead us out of animalism to the City of God? Isn't it obvious, little ones, that all these mediocrities were so much alike that we can dismiss their age entirely with the single word "Victorian"?

But I am digressing.

Once upon a time, as I said before, there was a

be-yewtiful parrot that was born by the Orinoco. He was caught young and put in a cage and sent to London. There ladies in crinolines and frilled trousers recited the "Courtship of Miles Standish" to him and, with the aid of lumps of sugar, taught him to say gravely, at the close of the recitation, "Thank you, Mr. Longfellow."

Years rolled on; but parrots don't die; and, when he was nearly a hundred years old, somebody with charming lengths of silk-stockinged leg acquired the parrot and desired to make him think for himself. So after six weeks of intensive lump-sugar he was taught to say "Hell! How Victorian!" But he repeated it so often, and was so pleased with the novelty, that he began to be rather a bore, even when his owner taught him to add "Give me Lytton Strachey!" And one day his owner (who had fallen in love) read the "Courtship of Miles Standish" for herself; and, being a young person of intelligence, said "That's really not a bad poem," and the parrot's remark, though, of course, he didn't know what he was saying (did he, little ones?) struck her as a rather fatuous bit of convention on her own part. So she sold the parrot to a truly advanced American, named Herbert Titters, for exactly three thousand times the amount she had paid for

him ; and Herbert took the parrot over to New York, and invited the truly advanced literary circles to hear him ; for those truly advanced circles were just beginning to say the things that were beginning to bore the truly advanced circles in England. And first of all Herbert spoke. He apologised for the necessity of reading or even mentioning such a poem in so loftily browed a company. With that instinct for the right word which characterises the truly modern critics of America, he affirmed that Longfellow was a congenital moron. He had written a poem about his " Lost Youth " ; and if he had neglected his opportunities of Dynamic Passion (indicating, of course, a congenital defect again) in that youth during which the truly advanced poets go to the devil under such magnificent Moralistic Urges, this was probably due to the fact that in childhood his Puritan parents had neglected to give him " grade A milk " from a good Virile Cow. You say that Longfellow would have derived Virile from a Latin root. Yes, sir, he would. He had taken his language and his ideas from Europe. He was not " autochthonous." (That is an old Middle Western word, little ones, an old, old Middle Western word. It grew out of the soil of Kansas, and it means " made in California," where the

lemons come from.) Longfellow was not autochthonous. He never wrote like that truly autochthonous Titan, Edgar Allan Poe, about such American subjects as the Rue Morgue (the real Paris is in Kansas, you know, little ones) ; or the " Pit and the Pendulum." He never wrote anything like the essay in which Poe says that Tennyson is the greatest of all poets ; or " Tamerlane," where he somehow seems to be blowing kisses to Byron's Ada ; or " Al Aaraaf," in which he whistles to Lalla Rookh ; or the poem to Helen, in which the Greece and Rome are, of course, in Missouri ; or the Assignation (which is about Venice, and that is not far from Los Angeles, little ones) ; or the " Raven," in which he ponders " over quaint and curious volumes " of surely autochthonous lore, and makes the fowl perch (you will remember, little ones) on a bust of Pallas (which is the Alaskan name for Abraham Lincoln) just above his chamber door. No, Longfellow was not a " Titan " American like that. He lost his youth in a New England seaport, it is true, while Poe went to an autochthonous school in England ; but little facts of that sort mean nothing to truly advanced biographers like Herbert ; and when Longfellow came to write—what subjects did he choose ? Why, he really wanted to write about

the saintly days of yore just as much as Poe did ; but he was a weakling (congenitally so) and he disguised his European complex by writing " Hiawatha " and " Evangeline " and the " Ride of Paul Revere," and some slave poems, and scores and scores of other poems on American subjects, including the " Building of the Ship," which we will never, never read, because he also wrote some bad poems like the " Psalm of Life." All truly advanced critics know that it is folly to sift the good from the bad when the girls' schools are unanimous in their opinion throughout this conventionally unconventional world. Anyway, Henry was not autochthonous, and that settles it. He had no interest in his American surroundings, such as Shelley showed in his English surroundings when he wrote " Prometheus Unbound." Herbert would therefore read them the " Courtship of Miles Standish," which, as they all know in the Bowery and Greenwich Village, is a tale of Ancient Greece, and they should hear what the latest critic, with the blood-red crest, had to say about it.

So Herbert read the " Courtship of Miles Standish " to the bitter end, and the parrot as usual pranced on his perch, and stiffened his wings, and for the forty thousandth time said

" Hell ! How Victorian ! Give me Lytton Strachey ! " And all the advanced Americans said " Gee ! That li'l' ole bird can think for himself ! That's noo ! D'je hear him say ' hell ' ? That's vital ! That's virile ! That's red-blooded ! Gee ! Ain't Lytton Strachey autochthonous ? Gee ! No one never said that before ! There's all the intelleck of God's own country in that one li'l' word, Victorian. No one ever borrowed that word, no, *sir !* " But, of course, it was exactly the same parrot.

And then an odd thing happened to the parrot, the sort of thing, I suppose, that happened to Balaam's ass. For the long green wings grew longer, and the ruby eyes glowed with a strange fire, and the crest that looked as if it had been dyed in the blood of Prester John flamed up like a wind-blown torch, and the whole creature seemed to glow as though it had suddenly acquired a soul. And it stood erect on its perch and spoke to that truly advanced circle, as though they were parrots, and as though the parrot were a man.

And first of all, he gave them Hiawatha in French, thus :

" O ma postérité, déplorable et chérie !
O mes fils ! écoutez la divine raison.

C'est Gitche Manito, le Maître de la Vie,
Qui vous parle ! celui qui dans votre patrie
A mis l'ours, le castor, le renne et le bison.
Bientôt vous recevrez de ma main un Prophète,
Mais si vous méprisez sa sagesse parfaite
Pauvres enfants maudits, vous disparaîtrez tous ! ''

And then he gave them Hiawatha in English, thus :

" Blithering idiots," he said, " go home and read ' Kéramos,' which is at least the work of an artist and a scholar. Longfellow was not one of the greatest poets ; but, when the mole-hill discovers that Skiddaw is not as lofty as Mont Blanc, that does not entitle the mole-hill to speak with silly contempt of Skiddaw. All the grubby little mole-hills in the world to-day are talking with arrogant contempt of the high hills, because they have heard at second-hand that the high hills are not equal to the Alps. Go home and get rid of your cheap conceit, and cease to fling your crude parrot-cries at men who, though they are not among the Dantes and Homers of the world, or even among the Tennysons and Shelleys, are yet infinitely above and beyond the range of your ignorance, in art, in thought, in scholarship and in manhood."

And the strange creature grew in stature till he

seemed like an angel, with plumage like a sunset-coloured sea, and his voice was heard saying: "When you speak as you have spoken of men that have brought a measure of beauty and poetry into millions of obscure lives, men who have not been disdained by the leaders of your own country in their own day, it is as though one heard a blear-eyed, coarse-mouthed, ignorant boor, in one of your smoking cars, trying to make a butt of a silent and gentle scholar. You fling your poor little scraps of half-digested information at him—unrelated scraps, picked out of the cheap journals of the day; and your raucous laugh applauds your own vulgarity. Your eyes are too dull to see the sensitive spirituality of his face. You treat him with impertinent familiarity. You seize upon the faults of art that better men than you have pointed out, and what else there was to be said about his real achievement as a poet you drown with a vacant guffaw. You have probably never even heard that one of the strongest and sternest critics that ever used our language spoke of Longfellow as the most haunting poet of the sea, while one of the most fastidious of æsthetic critics affirmed that the close of his 'Hymn to the Night' was a true example of the grand style in literature:

" 'Peace ! Peace ! Orestes-like I breathe this prayer,
Descend with broad-winged flight,
The welcome, the thrice prayed for, the most fair,
The best-belovèd Night.'

You sneer at his life, because it was loyal to God and man ; you sneer at his married life because it was clean ; and you sneer at his death, as though you, like Pumblechook, were superior even to that. These things do not necessarily raise the value of his art, except that a true man's word is always better in some respects than that of the poor little half-wits and vicious half-men whom you, by implication, would glorify. But you are ready to palter with the truth, even in this matter, and to affirm in set terms, even when this qualification has been carefully made, that his defenders would always base the claims of his art on the nobility of his life. Let me say again, then, that Longfellow is not among the great poets ; that he wrote much inferior work, and that unfortunately he is chiefly known by this ; but that he also wrote some true poems that will always live on their own merits, and will always be an honour to himself and to his country. Certainly no modern American, ' autochthonous ' or otherwise, has written lines that are more likely to live than those in which Longfellow expresses his own

feeling towards a poet greater than himself. It is rare (among the small minds who so cheaply abuse him) to find any kind of belief that any writer who ever lived is greater than themselves. Yet one thing is quite certain. The vast distance that separates Longfellow from Dante—and it *is* a vast distance—is not nearly so vast as the quite immeasurable gulf by which his latest biographer remains below Longfellow. With almost unbelievable conceit, that quite obscure person apologises in his preface for stooping to the subject. He would do far better, in the circumstances, to re-read what a man so much greater than himself, and of a spirit so infinitely finer, said of a poet above his own grasp—I mean those lines in which Longfellow, during his translation of Dante, compared himself with a labourer entering a great cathedral, and kneeling to pray, while 'the loud vociferations of the street become an indistinguishable roar.'

> " 'So, as I enter here from day to day
> And leave my burden at this minster gate,
> Kneeling in prayer and not ashamed to pray,
> The tumult of the time disconsolate
> To inarticulate murmurs dies away
> While the eternal ages watch and wait.' "

There was a pause for a moment. Then the

strange prophetic creature who had been changed to a soul and a voice said : " Those lines may not be great poetry, but they haunt my memory more than any others in American literature, and the last line is certainly the best single line ever written by an American. It has majesty, simplicity, and a sense of the immortal in it—the abiding behind the transient. I know that these things cannot reach you now, for in America your ' advanced ' circles are losing their souls. You have long since benumbed the faculties that can even dimly apprehend the sacred presence that Longfellow felt in those lines. There is a kind of life and thought which, as Burns said, ' hardens all within and petrifies the feeling.' You may say, too, that these lines are not ' autochthonous,' for they deal with Dante, and are written in English. But the American people itself is not ' autochthonous ' to the United States. It came, with all its civilisation, from Europe. Nor can any of you understand one another except in words that were made in Europe, and have centuries of secret meaning in their very syllables. If Longfellow Americanised immigrant elements from other lands he was absolutely at one with his country in this, one with her weakness, one with her strength, and one with the very fabric

of her body and soul. You speak of Poe as an 'autochthonous' Titan, because France and England gave him a posthumous reputation, when you had killed him and kicked him into the gutter. It may therefore interest you to know that unlike Poe (who was purely European) Longfellow introduced America into European poetry; and that Baudelaire, the grim author of 'Les Fleurs du Mal'—which, of course, you have never read—devoted the longest of the poems in that tempest-rousing volume to 'Le Calumet De Paix,' which he was not above describing as '*imité de Longfellow*.' Moreover Baudelaire, in whom, according to Swinburne, Apollo himself 'made manifest his music and his might' (while 'the most high Muses that fulfil all ages' wept over his tomb), was not above composing a poem of which the verses were stolen alternately from Gray's Elegy and from the 'Psalm of Life,' thus:

> " 'L'Art est long et le Temps est court.
> Loin des sépultures célèbres,
> Vers un cimetière isolé
> Mon cœur, comme un tambour voilé
> Va battant des marches funèbres.
>
> 'Maint joyau dort enseveli
> Dans les ténèbres et l'oubli,'

and so on. Well. What do you say now? Criti-

cism doesn't affect you ; but how about Longfellow as a source for ' Les Fleurs du Mal ' *which was suppressed, in Paris, by the police ?* How's that for a NEW idea ? "

There was silence again for one breathless moment. Then the " advanced " circle, which had been steadily growing more and more like rows of little green parrots, lifted up its voice with one accord and said : " Thank you, Oh, thank you, Mr. Longfellow ! "

But, of course, little ones, they hadn't changed at all ; for, all the time, even when they looked like men and women, they had really been nothing but parrots.

CARLYLE—HIS RISE AND FALL

"WHAT's the matter now?" said the Opalescent Parrot who recently startled the Intelligentsia of Greenwich Village, N.Y., by bursting out into a defence of Longfellow and George Meredith at the wrong moment. "Tut! Tut! Tut! what's the matter now?"

"Say your lesson, like a good parrot," said an Intellectual, offering the bird an olive stuffed with caviare, which was devoured with avidity. "Say your lesson:

> "'Thomas Carlyle, he sat on a wall.
> Thomas Carlyle, he had a great fall'—

Come now! It's the very latest."

"Of course it is," chuckled the Parrot. "But *I* know something else that is *going* to be the very latest."

"What is that?" said the Intellectual, who was carrying under his arm a volume entitled "Carlyle—His Rise and Fall." "Surely *our* latest is the final!" But his voice sounded a little nervous.

"Thomas Carlyle," said the Parrot.

"Good," said the Intellectual.

"His rise and fall," said the Parrot.

"Excellent," said the Intellectual.

"And resurrection?" said the Parrot, cocking a wickedly inquisitive eye at his interlocutor.

"There you go," said the Intellectual, "thinking for yourself again, for all the world like one of those——"

"Early Victorians?" asked the Parrot innocently.

"People who say things that nobody else, in our set, at the present moment, would think of saying," said the Intellectual angrily.

"Exactly," said the Parrot. "Oh, you splendidest of Intellectuals! Now, please, listen to me. Revaluations of the illustrious dead are sometimes necessary. Blind acquiescence in their glory is not even a real acceptance of it, and belongs to sheep rather than to men."

"The very point I desire to make," said the Intellectual. "I am always saying it."

"You are," said the Parrot, "for all this is elementary. Would it make you happier if I said it all over again?"

"Don't be rude," said the Intellectual.

"Nevertheless," the amazing bird continued,

" there is a limit to the value of these platitudes, which all you—er—bits of radium repeat so often, in the comic delusion that you are all saying something new. No revaluation, no criticism even, of any one or anything, is possible unless you have first of all a real standard of reference. You must find some central standard of judgment which is more than private caprice, or all is chaos."

" But there is no fixed standard," said all the other " Intellectuals " together, entering the room in a body (there are only a dozen of them). " Otherwise where should WE be ? "

" God knows ! " said the Parrot with a chuckle. " In Wormwood Scrubs, I should imagine."

" A central authoritative standard is undiscoverable. WE have nothing of the kind," said all the Intellectuals together, after an interval in which bright ejaculations of " gesture " and " complex " were rapidly tossed about. " We have almost decided that ugliness is beauty, and we are quite sure that morals are out of date."

" Exactly," said the Parrot, stretching out a long emerald wing, and scratching the back of his crimson head with an opal claw. " Exactly ; and, as I remarked, all is chaos. You are at the

mercy of every wind of opinion. You don't know what you really believe on any subject under the sun. You praise minor artists in terms that would make Shakespeare blush, and you talk with utter contempt of men that could pick you all up, intellectually, between a finger and thumb, and put you in their waistcoat pockets."

"But how can you establish any authority greater than our own?" said a bishop who had been keeping himself up to date on the latest reversions to Lucretian materialism, and in every sermon had bored a new hole through the creed of his own Church.

"In the first place," said the Parrot, "you must look at the multiplication tables. Twice one is two."

"You are insulting us," said the Intellectuals. "We learnt that at school."

"Quite so," said the Parrot, stretching out his other wing and scratching the other side of his crimson head, "but you have forgotten it."

"We don't understand you," said the bishop.

"It's not really so elementary as it looks," the curious bird replied. "I'm merely referring you to the earliest tables of the law. Accuracy, in all its kinds, is based upon them; and so we attain perhaps a first glimmer of what is meant by

truth. You must learn to be accurate, you know, little ones, even in your quotations. If you can even get as far as that—which you haven't—you have established the beginnings of a standard of truth. Only the beginnings, I admit."

"And then?" gasped the author of the book, who had spent so much time on those slight divergences from fact, or suppressions of fact, which make all the difference—"what then?"

"Why, if you really desire to hear," the Parrot went on, "there is another consequence of accuracy and truth which goes by the odd name of Justice. You must not forget Justice. If you can get as far as that—which you haven't—you have unveiled or discovered a little more of your permanent standard. Let me point out to you a certain passage—which of course you haven't read—in the third chapter of the fourth book of 'Frederick the Great':

> "'What is Justice but another form of the reality we love; a truth acted out? Of all the humbugs or 'painted vapours' known, Injustice is the least capable of profiting men or kings.'

"Read it once. Read it twice. Read it three times," the Parrot said, dilating his plumage. "For unless you read it three times you will not grasp it—the intellectual method of mastering a

book to-day being the very simple one of staring at the printed page until the author's words and thoughts are replaced by the delusions of the reader, or obliterated by reflections of the claptrap of the hour. It saves much trouble ; but it is not—er—cricket, or even hockey."

"But it is I who have accused Carlyle of inaccuracy. Where have *I* departed from the truth? And where would your multiplication tables help me?" said the author.

"The chief attempt of your book," said the Parrot, "seems to be to prove that Carlyle was largely responsible for the Great War. Now Carlyle was a giant ; but even he could have had no more influence on that world-catastrophe than a gnat could have on the Falls of Niagara. A little elementary mathematical work might help you there. Again you assert, without qualification, that Carlyle preached the doctrine that Might is Right. You must know, if you have read him thoroughly, that this is the exact opposite of the truth. Only an utter fool could seriously maintain that Might is Right, in the sense which you attribute to your own words. Carlyle did maintain the opposite—that Right is Might ; and that, armed with the right, though he stood alone against the world, one man was infinitely mighty.

This was the meaning of his praise of heroes like Dante, Shakespeare, Johnson. None of these had big armaments behind him. I will admit that in Carlyle's insistence upon the mightiness of right, careless readers may misunderstand his real meaning. He is so eager to prove that the stars in their courses fight for the true, and crush the evil, that the stress is laid on the strength and the reader may forget the cause of the strength. Carlyle may even, in some cases, attribute the right kind of strength to the wrong persons ; for he was not infallible. He made many mistakes. But in face of the emphatic answer given by Carlyle himself to this very charge, it is a grave injustice merely to repeat the charge without even mentioning the very striking passage in Froude which completely disposes of it. Carlyle's whole soul was at one with the great challenge of St. Paul :

"'Whoso hath felt the spirit of the Highest
Cannot confound nor doubt Him nor deny.
Yea, with one voice, O world, though thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.'

"But the injustices of the book are innumerable. It is hardly fair, for instance, to state that, owing to his 'self-assertion,' Carlyle mistranslated Goethe by introducing the word 'gloomy' into the famous lines :

" ' Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
Who never spent the darksome hours
Weeping and watching for the morrow—
He knows ye not, ye *gloomy* powers.'

Statements of this sort can only be made by a writer who is ready to gamble on the ignorance or the short memory of modern readers ; for the lines in ' Wilhelm Meister,' as they stand in all editions to-day, read : ' He knows ye not, ye *heavenly* powers.' Yet the statement about the mistranslation is made without any reference to this, and without any qualification.

" Moreover, there is a sneer in almost every other sentence of the book. There is a series of sneers at Carlyle's peasant birth—as though that were not an additional ground of respect for his achievement. There is also a series of sneers at his intercourse with the ' upper classes ' ; an absolute lack of insight into the problems of his career, and an utter lack of sympathy both for his human failings and the almost superhuman cravings of his great nature for light upon the ways of God to man. This was the tragedy of his life—that he was a profoundly religious man, born into an era in which all the solid grounds of his religion seemed to be breaking up. He did not understand Kant, says this wonderful new book,

though Carlyle takes his final stand on the categorical imperative. But does the author of this onslaught understand Kant any better? Can the subtlest metaphysician of to-day be quite sure of Kant's philosophy as a whole, and would even Kant himself stand by all his published works, if he had been able to revise them as a whole? What Carlyle extracted from them was at least lucid and valuable, and this is more than can be said for most of Kant's interpreters.

"Again there is a sneer at one of Carlyle's finest passages: 'With men of a speculative turn there come seasons, meditative, sweet, yet awful hours, when in wonder and fear you ask that unanswerable question: Who am I: the thing that can say I? The world with its loud trafficking retires into the distance; and you are alone with the Universe, and silently commune with it, as one mysterious Presence with another.' Understand this and you will understand Carlyle's reference to the supreme moment of the Catholic ritual as 'the one relic' of religion now left in Europe.

"Our author's comment on this is a sneer at both Carlyle and Tennyson, who made a similar remark to G. H. Lewes. 'The author of a "History of Philosophy" made no reply,' says our author, evidently much impressed by the fact

that the lesser man—G. H. Lewes—had written on that awe-inspiring subject, 'philosophy.' Perhaps G. H. Lewes was thinking that his great friend would have been understood by Plotinus, with his flight of the alone to the Alone. Certainly, lesser man though he was, his silence was not occupied with small malicious thoughts about the 'self-consciousness' of the great, simple, and majestic spirit who was pouring out his thoughts on God and immortality to him. To say the very least of it, he ought to have felt somewhat honoured. But this mosquito-like watchfulness for a chance of drawing blood is again typical of the new spirit.

"There is no doubt that Carlyle had great imperfections; for he was human to the red core of his heart; but he that would explore these imperfections and put his fingers into the giant's wounds must be of a very different mental and spiritual stature from most of those who attempt the task to-day. He must be not only Carlyle's intellectual peer, but capable also of a godlike compassion. The subject of his inquiry will not be exhumed from his poor old grave merely that his bones may be scattered to the four winds by a contemptuous boot, or the ape-like fury of little men, half crazy with self-conceit and vainly

striving to clamber on to the scornful pedestal from which they hope to throw down the silent and indifferent statue of the dead.

"It is perfectly true that Carlyle has no elaborate philosophy to give us. He contradicts himself. The world had taken away his Master, and he knew not where they had laid him. But he still has an immense value in his power as a great prose-poet of dissolving the shows of this world into the mysteries of the spiritual world. His chapter on 'Natural Supernaturalism' in 'Sartor Resartus' (if he had written nothing else) would place him among the greatest writers of the world.

"'Once more I say, sweep away the illusion of Time: compress the three-score years into three minutes. . . . Are we not Spirits, that are shaped into a Body, into an Appearance; and that fade away again into Air and Invisibility? This is no metaphor, it is a simple scientific *fact;* we start out of Nothingness, take figure, and are Apparitions; round us, as round the veriest spectre, is Eternity; and to Eternity minutes are as years and æons. . . . Where now is Alexander of Macedon: does the steel Host, that yelled in fierce battle-shouts at Issus and Arbela, remain behind him; or have they all vanished utterly, even as perturbed goblins must; Napoleon, too, and his Moscow Retreats and Austerlitz Campaigns! Was it all other than the veriest Spectre-

hunt ; which has now, with its howling tumult that made Night hideous, flitted away ?—Ghosts ! There are nigh a thousand million walking the earth openly at noontide ; some half-hundred have vanished from it, some half-hundred have arisen in it, ere thy watch ticks once. . . .

" ' Thus like some wild-flaming, wild-thundering train of Heaven's artillery, does this mysterious Mankind thunder and flame, in long-drawn, quick-succeeding grandeur through the unknown Deep. Thus, like a god-created, fire-breathing Spirit-host, we emerge from the Inane ; haste stormfully across the astonished Earth ; then plunge again into the Inane. . . . Can the Earth, which is but dead and a vision, resist Spirits which have reality and are alive. . . . But whence ?—O Heaven, whither ? Sense knows not ; Faith knows not ; only that it is through Mystery to Mystery, from God and to God.'

" Few men since Dante have rivalled him in this prophetic power, and none since Shakespeare has so masterfully compelled his language to express it ; and it is foolish to say, as this latest depreciation says, that it might have been better if he had never written at all. An unprecedented amount of time and energy is being spent on the depreciation of their greater predecessors by writers of to-day. Volume after volume tumbles from the press in which giant after giant is attacked by dwarf after dwarf. The grimly sardonic lines

of Tennyson have been illustrated over and over again recently by almost every figure of real importance in modern literature where,

> " ' whether he heed it or not,
> Each man walks with his head in a cloud of poisonous flies.'

The flies have been treated with a tolerance that is never vouchsafed to their victims. There has been far too much of it. It has no relation to real criticism, which is in honour bound to seek first for the merits of the work itself, if merit be there. We do not employ miners to bury the gold and bring the dross home in malignant triumph. Criticism is in honour bound to seek first for the gold, *if it be there*. This does not mean that it must be lenient or easygoing if there be none. It means the exact opposite. But criticism must be even more severe with itself than it is with its subject. Thousands of ignorant modern readers are only too ready to chuckle over the faults of the great dead. It is one of the worst sides of human nature. Let criticism make sure of its own truth before it speaks. If there be no gold, let it say so. But let it beware of denying its presence, though all the fashions deny it, if it be really there. In many cases the motive is only too obvious. It is almost unbelievable, but the

ironic gods have decreed that the author of this book should be described on his title page as 'Norwood Young,' author of 'THE Life of Frederick the Great.' The emphasis on 'the' is mine. Underneath this there is a certain little scroll, bearing the words : 'Humilitate. 'Thomas Carlyle.' The gods always defend their own offspring."

A REVALUATION OF POE

" GOOD-MORNING, little one," said the Parrot to the new visitor whom he recognised as an Intellectual by all the familiar stigmata, including the Epstein eye-slant, the Van Gogh nose-twitch, and an impressive habit of saying " hum " at the end of his more important remarks.

" I've just been reading that very interesting article of yours on the author of ' Crowing Poppies,' whom I see you compare with Isaiah, Carlyle, Savonarola, Schopenhauer, Goethe, and Mr. James Peewit, the last winner of the *Mens Insana* prize for the most arresting book of verse produced by any inmate under forty."

" Inmate ? " said the Intellectual, haughtily moving his ears.

" Inmate," said the Parrot firmly. " That would be essential ; though I suppose, if the competitors couldn't produce their birth-certificates, you would allow any obvious cases of arrested development. But I observe that you gave no clue to the meaning of the title. Don't you know why a poppy crows ? "

"For the—er—Dawn," said the Intellectual, "and—er—the growing freedom of the mind. Hum!"

"Bug," said the Parrot.

"I beg your pardon," said the Intellectual, a little startled.

"Not at all," said the Parrot. "Take the word 'poppy.' Think it over. Attach it by a hyphen to another word of one syllable. No—not a swear word! Think of Peter."

"Oh, I know," said the Intellectual brightly. Then he changed his mind, and said, "No, I can't think."

"Well, as long as you admit that, I don't mind," said the Parrot. "However, I've some news for you, something quite, quite new."

"News," said the Intellectual. "It's against the rules for parrots. Parrots always say the same thing over and over again. Hum!"

"Bug," said the Parrot again.

"What an extraordinary expletive of yours that is," said the Intellectual.

"How intolerably traditional you are," replied the Parrot, "and how repetitive. You might be suffering from echolalia in its worst form. Yet you call yourself emancipated. You'll be toddling

off with an Anglican Bishop to an agnostic revival meeting next. By the bye, I've drawn up a list of all the things you admire, and all the things you sneer at, and I've discovered that what you intellectuals are suffering from is the herd-instinct. There isn't really the difference of a hair between your opinions, in all the highbrow journals of the whole blessed Universe. Every schoolgirl knows exactly how to talk to you. Isn't Epstein marvellous ? "

" You oughtn't to say that," said the Intellectual. " It's not in your part. You ought to say, ' Isn't G. F. Watts uplifting ? ' "

" You forget that I'm only a parrot," said the bewildering bird. " I can't be expected to echo what nobody else is echoing ; and I'm only saying what all the schoolgirls would say to you. Isn't Dickens twite ? "

" Twite ? " said the Intellectual.

" Twite," said the Parrot, ruffling out all his green feathers. " Twite, almost as twite as ' In Memawiam.' That's what a crop-headed girl of twelve said to me last week, shortly after I had read a volume of the Gifford lectures in which ' In Memawiam ' was quoted on every page, by one of the subtlest of modern philosophers, to illustrate the problems of Pluralism and the Realm of

Ends. I asked the schoolgirl what she thought on that subject, but she only opened her china-blue eyes, wrote a scarlet letter on her baby forehead with a lipstick, and said, ' to the pure all things are pure,' so, of course, I knew that she was modern, and all that, and must really know. For myself, being only a parrot, I say ' *twite*,' too. *Twite*. Do you understand me? *Twite*. Isn't James Joyce be-yew-tiful? "

" Good God," said the Intellectual, " this parrot has gone mad."

" Nor'-nor'-west," said the Parrot. " It's not my business to imitate *you*, Polonius, dear. All the same, I've got some real news."

" Tell me at once," said the Intellectual.

" An Intellectual, who might be your own reflection in a looking-glass, told me yesterday that, although he was suckled by Freud, baptised by Jung, christened by Jew Süss, and had all his views in the right highbrow pigeon-holes (e.g., *Great authors*—Arthur Rimbaud, Peewit, Joyce, etc. *Negligible authors*—Hugo, Dickens, Browning, etc.), he believed that he was sometimes wrong in his judgment."

" Impossible," said the Intellectual, " unless the Judgment Day is coming."

" Twite," said the Parrot. " But the Judgment

Day is already here. Do you know what I see written upon *your* forehead ? "

" There is nothing at all on *my* forehead," said the Intellectual.

" And not very much inside it, either," said the Parrot. " All the same, if you are not afraid of impairing that smooth and solid ivory by a few thoughtful wrinkles, I want to try an experiment. You are fond of destructive criticism, aren't you, for the greater figures of the Victorian Period ? Now, I have a little test for you. I have a theory that you are all entirely conventional in your choice of the figures to whom your ' free destructive criticism ' is to be applied. All the schoolgirls know them beforehand. Dickens ? Yes. Tennyson ? Yes. Thumbs down. Dowson ? No. Edgar Allan Poe ? No. Thumbs up. Why ? Because the former are above your rivalry and the latter more within your reach. Anyway, as I'm only a parrot, let's try a little destructive criticism. But I'm not going to destroy what you humans are all out to destroy. I'm a mere parrot and I am going to apply your own methods—with a little more justice, of course, to one of your own pets, Edgar Allan Poe, for instance. You understand, of course, that in criticism it is perfectly easy to wreck the appeal

of any work of art by suggesting the wrong atmosphere and approaching it in the wrong spirit. We will not wilfully do this ; but suppose—only suppose—that one of the poets whom you dislike at the present day had written those haunting lines :—

'To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells—
Bells, bells, bells,
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells . . .
To the swinging and the ringing
Of the bells, bells, bells
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells . . . .'

and so on. What a delightful outpouring of the old outworn parrot-phrases we should have had ; the phrases that you cannot resist applying to the severest and austerest metrical forms in the writers to whom you find it the fashion to apply them—'fatal facility,' 'meretricious jingle.' You might set a stanza of Donne beside it and say, 'Look on this picture and on this,' with all your dear little intellectual noses in the air. Nothing, of course, could be more unjust to Poe. A little thought at once reveals the subtler significance of those exquisite lines

'The bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells,'

and still more so of

> 'His merry bosom swells . . .
> And he dances and he yells,
> To the bells, bells, bells
> Bells, bells, bells, bells.'

"I have not counted the bells, but you can stick them in more or less as you please without injuring the lovely cadences. I saw a politician once, listening, with his mouth wide open in admiration, while an elocutionist recited them to the tune of the 'Blue Bells of Scotland.' Wonderful how he ran up and down the scale! However, it is not music, but *atmosphere*, as we all know, that really counts. So let us consider that 'velvet violet lining' of the cushions which the lady turned inside out in 'The Raven,' or that exquisite passage from one of those mysterious atmospheric tales (you may fill in to your own fancy, from any preface to the works of Poe). I mean the passage in which 'The small bare and silvery feet of the Marchesa Aphrodite' are 'flooded with a blush' as they 'gleam in the black mirror of marble beneath her,' because 'having left in the eager haste of a mother's heart, the privacy of her own *boudoir*, she has neglected to enthral her tiny feet in their slippers, and *utterly forgotten to throw over her Venetian shoulders that drapery which is their due.*'

"Isn't that be-yew-tiful language. It almost makes my own feet blush. But I *do* like *utterly* forgotten, don't you? And there's quite a lot to be said for 'Venetian' as an autochthonous adjective.

"However, let us take things in order, and consider his work as a whole, with that passage simply as an exemplary text. It is taken from the Oxford Press selection of his Works."

"Hum!" said the Intellectual.

"Bug!" said the Parrot.

And, with this preliminary, the amazing bird delivered himself thus :—

* * *

The life of Poe, coloured by not a little fiction, has exercised a Byronic fascination on so many of his later critics that there is considerable confusion of judgment with regard to the intrinsic merit of his works. He is now one of those poets who are "taken as read." His name is used by French critics as a convenient bank-note to represent certain values—chiefly of the infernal order—and nobody takes the trouble to discover whether there is gold enough in the vaults of the poet's works to justify the paper currency. It is enough apparently that the vaults should glimmer with "*la phosphorescence de la pourriture.*" Gautier, in

fact, in a rapturous tribute to Poe's tales declared that they caused " *une suffocation de terreur égale aux plus noires inventions d'Anne Radcliffe, de Lewis et du révérend père Mathurin* " ; and the context makes it clear that he is unaware of the tenth-rate implications of the comparison. M. Paul Bourget, again, solemnly compares Poe with Proclus, Swedenborg and De Quincey. If we combine these with Gautier's set of comparisons we obtain a mixture of values which certainly suggests that we should re-examine the works of Poe himself. Gautier observes, in a passage of conventional artistic humbug, that if " *l'auteur du* Corbeau *et d'*Eureka had applied his faculties in a manner more appropriate to the American soil, he might have become ' a money-making author.' " One cannot help wondering whether Gautier had ever really read the " Eureka." If he had, with his exquisite artistic faculty, it is difficult to suppose that he would have dwelt upon it at all. There is, in fact, an air of make-believe about all these critical estimates of Poe. It pervades his own account of how he wrote " The Raven " ; and in the " Eureka " it is perhaps more apparent than anywhere else. The very title of that work, which he declared to be the final solution of the mystery of the universe, is a piece of schoolboy

sensationalism. "I, Edgar Allan Poe, have found it!" What a revelation of his intellectual quality! Imagine, if you can, Emerson perpetrating anything so cheap as even the title of the philosophic rarity that won the praise of Gautier and induced him to belittle America for thinking that Poe was misusing his faculties. When we read Poe's introduction to that work we have an uneasy sense of the charlatanry of a writer who was doing his best to "put it over" the undeveloped America of his day: "What I here propound is true; therefore it cannot die; or if by any means it is now trodden down so that it die, it will 'rise again to the life everlasting.' Nevertheless it is as a poem only that I wish this work to be judged after I am dead." And again in his correspondence—"What I have propounded will (in good time) revolutionise the world of physical and metaphysical science. I say this calmly, but I say it."

He is dramatising himself here as the hero of one of his own stories, and there is a certain irony in the fact that he was able to impose his own picture of himself, not on the Americans (Professor Woodberry has seen to that), but on the logical compatriots of Voltaire. But Poe, translated into French by Baudelaire, and thereby acquiring a

"European reputation," suffers an Atlantic-change. The meretriciousness of which he cannot be acquitted in his own language is often revealed by the mere turn of a phrase in the original. The foreign translator—blissfully unconscious of this—transmutes it into the language of a decadent but technically impeccable preciosity. There is no harm in the title of "The Gold-Bug." It is American, and forthright; but the French translation of it is a good instance of what I mean. *Le Scarabée d'Or*—as a phrase—for a jeweller in words like Gautier, has an entirely different quality. Again, when the American talks of Guy de Vere and Lady Rowena Trevanion, and sighs that his love has been borne o'er the billow "to age and titled crime and an unholy pillow," the Frenchman, unaware of the Minerva Press, or Wardour Street, or even the *Family Herald*, may break out into raptures over "*ces figures de femmes, si vaporeuses, si transparentes, si romanesquement pâles*," while the more discerning readers of Poe's own language on both sides of the Atlantic feel distinctly uneasy about it all.

The latest biography of Poe, in two large volumes, may be regarded as a massive supplement to the life by Professor Woodberry, a work which is never likely to be superseded. The new

material is interesting ; but it is almost entirely concerned with side issues. There is, for instance, an excellent reproduction of an old print of a conflagration in a town where Poe once resided. But the book is chiefly interesting as an attempt to reconstruct the environment of Poe's life. It does not escape the perils of all attempts to " complete " the story of a life where evidence is lacking ; and, in giving hypothetical details of conversations, of which there is no record, and love-affairs which, if they happened at all, happened behind doors that are closed to the biographer, the book unfortunately contributes to the general atmosphere of " make-believe." The biographer apparently realises, for instance, that a certain unsavoury suggestion in the life of Byron roused considerable interest in audiences neither fit nor few ; and he actually raises the question whether Poe was guilty of the same offence. There is not the slightest ground for the suggestion, and the question is only raised to be refuted ; but here again one feels that the subject of the book is surrounded with an atmosphere of make-believe. It is difficult, moreover, to sympathise with the biographer's wrath against the man who adopted and educated Poe. It is all very well to call him a Shylock because he would not be

responsible for the debts that Poe contracted at college. An adopted son who, in the first few weeks of his life at college, contracts debts for eighteen suits of clothes with brass buttons can hardly plead " genius " as an excuse. The tragic martyrdom of true genius in its own high endeavours is too sacred and rare a thing to be used, as it is used to-day, to justify mere silliness, or to taunt the rest of the world for not meekly surrendering to folly. It is all very well to say that all Poe wanted was " sympathy." Apparently he also wanted eighteen coats with brass buttons ; and the debts that he incurred in craziness of this kind would have paid over and over again for some of the other necessities with which we are harrowed. The truth is that he was incorrigible ; and that there was a real flaw in his own nature. It was when he was prosperous that he took to drink ; and, on the whole, the most striking feature of his life is the extraordinary patience and sympathy which were bestowed upon him. The story of Mrs. Clemm, the mother of his wife, and his own second mother, is one of the most moving stories of saintly devotion in literature. He never liked to be alone, and she used to sit with him till four o'clock in the morning, while he was writing, and make coffee for him. She tramped

from office to office seeking work for him when, by his own madness, he had flung himself on the streets. Whatever his failings, and whatever his sins were, her heart was always open to him, and her mind never condemned him. Far more often than the conventionally unconventional will recognise, simple human nature has proved itself the lovable thing it is in its dealings with the sometimes rather inhuman "artistic temperament." And Poe himself recognised it. He wrote nothing truer than the sonnet entitled "To My Mother"; and it is worth a million "Eurekas."

Even the best of his tales have a meretriciousness and that fatal air of "make-believe" which destroys true mystery. . "The Fall of the House of Usher" utilises all the schoolboy devices—the intent listening; the creakings of the stairs; the stealthy approach; then the bursting open of the door and the yell that strikes you dead. But where in all this is the intellectual breadth and depth that you get in such a tale as "The Haunted Man" of Dickens? Poe's tale is not even clearly imagined. The coffin is carried down from the lamp-lit library to its unnecessarily horrible vault by the two men alone; and in order to make the scene more picturesquely flam-

boyant, they apparently carry torches. It is somewhat remarkable that they did not set the house on fire, for neither of them had more than two hands; and the house was crowded with Wardour Street furniture. The tales simply will not bear analysis if we are to adopt the standards of first-rate literature. If, on the other hand, we are in the mood for Mrs. Radcliffe and Monk Lewis, Poe's tales have undoubtedly a fascination of their own.

His real contribution to the treasure-house of literature—his permanent contribution—is not to be found in the tales or in the pseudo-philosophy, or even in such artificial work as "The Raven." It is only a forced ingenuity that can explain how the shadow could be thrown on the floor, in the last stanza, by the "streaming of the lamp-light" over a bird that sat on a bust "above the chamber door." An earlier stanza makes it clear that the lamp was in the room. This, of course, is a minor detail, but there are more serious flaws. The versification is of the superficially tricky kind that is more suitable to a humorous than a serious subject; and the symbolical value of the poem is disturbed by such phrases as those about the "ungainly fowl" which indicate Poe's failure to reconcile the

manner with the underlying thought. It is not here, but in the less notorious and quieter lyrics that he achieves work of a permanent value.

> " It was many and many a year ago
> In a kingdom by the sea . . ."

There is the true note—simple, sincere and profoundly moving. Again, in " The Sleeper," he evokes—as by an incantation—that strange world of dreams of which his Eleonoras and Lady Rowenas only destroyed the illusion. A curious example of this destructive meretriciousness, caught in the very act, is given to us in the two versions of the poem entitled " To One in Paradise ". As it was first written it is perhaps the most perfect of all his lyrics :

> " Thou wast all that to me, love,
> For which my soul did pine—
> A green isle in the sea, love,
> A fountain and a shrine,
> All wreathed with fairy fruits and flowers,
> And all the flowers were mine.
>
> Ah, dream too bright to last !
> Ah, starry Hope ! that didst arise
> But to be overcast !
> A voice from out the future cries,
> ' On ! On ! '—but o'er the Past
> (Dim gulf !) my spirit hovering lies
> Mute, motionless, aghast !

For, alas ! alas ! with me
  The light of life is o'er !
' No more—no more—no more '—
  (Such language holds the solemn sea
To the sands upon the shore),
  Shall bloom the thunder-blasted tree
Or the stricken eagle soar !

And all my days are trances,
  And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy grey eye glances,
  And where thy footstep gleams—
In what ethereal dances,
  By what eternal streams."

Later on Poe incorporated this beautifully simple poem in an extraordinarily artificial and flamboyant story of Venice, a tale in the very worst manner of the most luscious passages in Disraeli. After describing how " the small, bare and silvery feet of the Marchesa Aphrodite " were flooded with a blush as they " gleamed in the black mirror of marble beneath her," he asks the cause of that extraordinary phenomenon and says : " To this demand there is no answer—except that, having left in the eager haste and terror of a mother's heart the privacy of her own *boudoir*, she has neglected to enthral her tiny feet in their slippers, and utterly forgotten to throw over her Venetian shoulders that drapery which is their due." As an example of the world's worst style that passage is almost perfect. After a page

or two of this stuff his hero discovers the poem, scribbled in a book, " blotted with fresh tears " and facing a passage of " heart-stirring excitement, although tainted with impurity." In order to bring the poem into accord with its context he deliberately ruins it. He changes " eternal streams " to " Italian streams," and then closes with that appalling additional stanza :

" Alas, for that accursed time
They bore thee o'er the billow,
From love, to titled age and crime,
And an unholy pillow."

The notes in the new Oxford edition of the poems, which includes this version, have not noticed the cause of its falsifications. They are more than ever regrettable in a poem which is otherwise so true and so moving.

It is the fashion among admirers of obscurity to praise " Ulalume " ; but, quite apart from the fact that, like " The Raven," its manner does not harmonise with the discoverable parts of its theme (the manner of the rivers that roll down Mount Yaanek being that of Edward Lear), it falls to pieces on analysis. Having told us that " Psyche " means " his soul," he is found immediately afterwards at the " end of the vista " where he

" pacified Psyche and kissed her."

I have ventured to point out elsewhere that it is not lawful for a man to kiss his own soul. It is not in these obscurities, but in half a dozen flashes of perfectly lucid sincerity that his real value is to be found ; in the early poem to " Helen " ; in " The Haunted Palace " ; and in such verses as those that give absolutely true expression to his own despair among the implacable laws of the universe :

" I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand—
How few ! yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep, while I weep !

O God ! can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp ?
O God, can I not save
One from the pitiless wave ?
Is *all* that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream ? "

In this poem even the apparent technical awkwardness of the line which begins with the word " them " gives us an almost onomatopœic effect of the straining attempt to grasp what he is losing, and the result is masterly so far as it goes. But it cannot be forgotten that the idea is—from another point of view—as elementary as the listenings and

creakings of the tales. There is no vision in this of anything beyond ; and no spiritual depth. It is the heart-rending sobbing despair of a child, without any of the intellectual power of Emerson's profound " Threnody " :

> " Silent rushes the swift Lord
> Through ruined systems still restored.
> House and tenant go to ground,
> Lost in God, in Godhead found."

In fact, when truth is found again, the simple best of Whittier, his " Vesta," for instance, will have more beauty for posterity than anything Poe ever wrote.

AN INTERLUDE

"AND now," said the Parrot, ruffling out his emerald tail-feathers into an exquisite Aztec fan, "kindly applaud my daring."

"Daring?" said the elderly young woman who had not met him before. (She was wearing black pyjamas, and under her arm she was carrying a huge volume. It was that superbly obscene work of genius, "The Baboon Companion.") "You're only a parrot. You ought to know by this time that *We* are the only daring ones. See what *I'm* carrying. It has been praised by all the truly distinguished crickets, and condemned and burnt by all the magistrates."

"It looks like the London Telephone book," said the Parrot. "Funny, isn't it? Take a quarter of a century to write a quarter as much, and the same crickets will whirr, 'How verbose!' So I suppose it was written in three weeks, with a fine selective art. Anyway, you're all praising it, and even the newspapers say that nobody would dare to praise Longfellow, seriously, in public to-day. But I've broken the rules! I've done

it ! I've found something to praise in what you would call the banalities of a Longfellow, and I've dared to tell a little truth about what you would call the lovely atmosphere of an Edgar Allan Poe. There is nothing left for a Parrot but to be free, when human beings are all talking twaddle by rote. In fact,

> " ' *I have done a braver thing*
> *Than all the worthies did,*
> *And a second thence doth spring,*
> *Which is——* ' "

" Oh, Whittier, I s'pose ? " said the intellectual lady wearily.

" Stung again," said the Parrot. " Try Dean Inge :

> " ' *And a second thence doth spring,*
> *Which is—*
> *To keep—*
> *My black pyjamas hid.* ' "

" Of course," said the intellectual lady, " these birds don't really *mean* anything. There is obviously no real connection between——"

" *Ars est celare artem,*" said the Parrot. " Philistia, be thou glad of me. And now, while you are rearranging your thoughts in a really slinky contemporary pattern, let us have a little soothing interlude from Gertrude."

"Stein?" said the intellectual lady, with a start.

"Oh, surely, just plain Gertrude to *us!*" said the Parrot.

And with that the amazing bird began to prance up and down on his perch solemnly chanting:

"*Meet me at the corner of the street she said it is raining bring your own umbrella at the corner of the street it is your own umbrella bring me the corner of the street she said.*

"*Said she street corner bring umbrella own street corner raining is it said she street corner Tuesday after Wednesday week Tuesday following.*

"*Meet me at the corner of the street she said it is raining bring your own umbrella at the corner of the street it is your own umbrella bring me the corner of the street she said.*"

"And after all that," the Parrot continued sadly, "he took the wrong umbrella and went to Cavendish Square on the wrong Tuesday."

He stopped abruptly, and, after cocking his eye at his interlocutor from several angles, remarked, "Now let's have some poetry—a little thing of my own. If you write it down, don't forget to begin every line with a small letter, so that we may be as unlike the vulgar herd as are the writers of the

advertisements in the newspapers. In the second stanza you might *end* every word with a capital. *Odi profanum vulgus*, don't *you?* Now then—

" there Was Once A Peacock Lived In A Pleasaunce
with A Tail As Broad As A Cedar Bough ;
and Whenever He Wished To Proclaim His Presence
he CrieD ' Mee-oW ! '

" therE waS alsO a witlesS would-bE poeT
whO wanteD tO sinG, buT coulD neveR learN hoW ;
anD wheneveR hE wisheD thE neighbourS tO knoW iT
he crieD ' Mee-oW ! '

" and all the people who dwelt around 'em
whenever they heard that hellish row
yelled, in the hope that it might confound 'em,
' *Oh, mee-ow, mee-ow !* '

" but the bird and the bardlet, greatly flattered,
chuckled, ' Aha, we are famous now ! '
to make a real fuss was the thing that mattered,
so—once more—' *Mee-ow !* ' "

* * * * *

" And now," said the Parrot, " having relieved our stuffed bosoms of that, let us consider what a really nice Frenchman would do in the Garden of Eden."

A FRENCH VIEW OF MILTON

MANY years ago, a humorous and learned author amused himself by writing a mock-review of a certain Mr. Milton, whose long poem—" Paradise Lost "—he dismissed with ignominy. But serious critics had already had their fling, and it might have been left to a French historian of English literature to add the finishing touches. M. Taine, in his chapter on Milton, wrote like two men. The first (Dr. Jekyll) said all the expected things and placed his subject by the side of Homer. The second (Mr. Hyde), annihilating point by point every possible basis for that lofty judgment, wrote thus :

" This Adam entered Paradise *via* England. There he learned respectability and moral speechifying.

" Eve is from Oxford too.

" I listen to them, and I hear an English household —Colonel Hutchinson and his wife. Heavens ! Dress them at once ! Folk so cultivated should have invented before all things a pair of trousers and modesty."

The trousers, we may suppose, were to be worn by Adam, and we gather that they were to be

Oxford trousers. But, with true French gallantry, M. Taine, arriving in Eden, *via* Boulogne, finds himself unable to suggest any improvement to Madame Eve, except perhaps the immaterial addition of a charming emotion.

And so, one observes, the game to which M. Taine invited us can be played at his own expense. Exquisitely as he was diverted by "Paradise Lost" (and one hastens to note that he was prodigiously "tickled" by Satan as well as by Adam and Eve), one may derive even more pleasure from the vision that he conjures up—of M. Taine himself confronted by the unfallen manhood and womanhood of Milton's ideal world. Plato might have understood those masterpieces of poetry, those forms of perfection; but M. Taine, the second, stands there like a little artist who, having fallen asleep in a dingy café of Montmartre, awakes—or dreams that he awakes—in such a Paradise as Titian might have painted. Trailing his latter-day fogs of realism, he is a little confused between his own ideas of primitive man and Milton's idea of those unfallen beings. However, with an ironical bow, he sweeps off his black slouch hat and quotes a line or two from De Musset. Alas! It evokes no response! The superb snow-limbed creatures under the solemn

black floating rafts of the cedar trees neither see nor hear him. The lively manners, the witty tongue, the wink, the dazzling smile, the giggle, the wriggle, the grimace that had made so favourable an impression last night on the lady with the painted eyes at the next table—are all wasted on these "glorious, strong, voluptuous children, naked in the light of heaven." Have their innocent eyes no more thought, then, than those of the bull and cow on the grass beside them? Alas! They are so full of thoughts that they are quite unaware of his Parisian presence. They look towards him. They look right through him. But they do not see him. A strange suspicion occurs to us as we read. (How beautifully this would go in his own French!). Perhaps they are right in not seeing him. Perhaps, in grim truth, we have hit upon the explanation of all M. Taine's difficulties. *He is not there at all, and never could be there.*

> "Thus these two
> Imparadis't in one another's arms
> The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill
> Of bliss on bliss."

And the superb picture baffles him, as it must always baffle the superficially clever children of mere sophistication. Its large simplicity—though

it seemed so naïve to the second M. Taine—is the very condition of those qualities which justified the first M. Taine in placing Milton among the greatest epic poets of the world. The very passages which the second M. Taine singled out for his special derision have the depth and splendour of the great masters ; the frank and vast simplicity of a sky which—for all its lucid summer blue—conceals myriads of worlds and reduces the little sophistications of our modern cities to something quite insignificant. We all know how the clever folk, in all generations, could pick out for ridicule a line like :

" With conjugal attraction unreproved "

or

" No fear lest dinner cool ".

The amazing thing is that the clever folk have not yet discovered that it is just because the poet has that kind of a mind—the simplicity of greatness—that he is able to do what he has done in great poetry. It has always been so. It was so with Wordsworth (and not at all so with his innumerable parodists). It was so with Carlyle (and not at all so with Jeffrey). It was so with Tennyson (and not at all so with Oscar Wilde). It was so with Shakespeare—that " jackdaw

tricked out in borrowed feathers" whose lack (not of the supreme qualities of the intellect but of the "intellectualism" which conceals their absence) has nauseated a far more "clever" dramatist.

And what does all this mean? It means that genius is exactly the opposite of what the clever people of to-day think it is. It arises in great simple persons, and masters them and urges them on, like a passion in the blood, to ends that are above and beyond any that the conscious mind can aim at or attain. It is not concerned with the avoidance of the commonplace, but with the gradual unveiling of the eternal truth, which has always been there awaiting the process; and there is only one truth, but there are myriads of novel departures from it. Those who wish to discover "genius," therefore, must not seek among the crowded ranks of the "quick" and the "clever," but amongst those at whom they sneer. And the supreme type of genius is that Figure of whom Pilate, the type of cynical intellectualism, asked his mocking question—"What is Truth?" For our present purpose we may take the answer of Keats:

> "Beauty is truth, truth beauty; that is all
> Ye know on earth and all ye need to know."

It is just because Milton's picture of Paradise is as far above and beyond mere "cleverness" as the heavens are above the earth that it is immortal poetry. Curiously enough, too, it is not the severity of the Puritan in Milton, but his frank acceptance of passion and the senses that really shocked the sophisticated Frenchman. Where is the use of being a daring minor intellectualist and dabbler in the tepid waters of evil, if the dwellers in Paradise have so much the best of it? There is something shameless about two beings so innocent of the shifting and bedecking and be-draping of the modern novel:

> "Half her swelling breast
> Naked met his, under the flowing gold
> Of her loose tresses hid."

It is to be noted that the great artist describes that embrace in the very movement of his verse. He throws the stress back, in the second line, so that the first syllable of "under" meets the pressure of the preceding monosyllable "his" (which is also stressed by the metre), and these two stressed syllables, gently meeting in the music of the line, describe, with a beauty that no painter or sculptor could surpass, the very curve and pressure of the cool flesh. Mr. Bridges in his excellent classification of the variations of Milton's

blank verse does not seem to realise that these variations (which, in the case of supernumerary syllables, he too often calls " elisions ") are always an expression of lights and shades in the poet's meaning. In fact, he suggests that it would be trivial to suppose that Milton usually varied the stresses of his line for any other purpose than the surely more trivial one of avoiding superficial monotony. This is entirely to misunderstand the methods of the highest poetry—in which the lesser end is implied naturally in the greater, and need not be considered separately by the master of his instrument. There is not one of the shifted stresses that does not convey a meaning as surely as the touch of a musician upon the strings of a violin. It may be added that while classification of the variations and " elisions " may be suggestive to the student, it is as imperfect in its results—from the point of view of poetry—as an attempt to classify the quiverings of those strings under the musician's hand. But it enables one to understand how the ear of Mr. Bridges allowed him, at the beginning of all editions of one of his works during a score of years, to misquote one of the most famous passages of Keats :

" O latest-born and loveliest vision far
Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy ! "

This was what Keats desired to give to the world. But Mr. Bridges introduces a second " O " into that first line, thus :

" O latest-born, O loveliest vision far."

To give a separate " O " to the first phrase is to give it an undue proportion in the line ; for Keats was not devoting his ecstasy to the lateness of the birth, but to its loveliness. The flowing and interwoven harmony of the ideas is destroyed ; and, though the mistake may seem insignificant to the casual reader, it will not seem so to the mind that has once pulsed into harmony with any great lyric, and knows how impossible it is in such a case to misquote it by even a syllable. The ear, then, recognises these things as instantly as a musician recognises a false note.

It is not surprising, of course, that M. Taine should miss much in the technique of " Paradise Lost." Missing that, he does actually miss a great part of its meaning ; for the full content of poetry is not conveyed by the mere surface-meaning of the words, but by that inner music in the very order of the syllables which gives them an inevitability like that of a natural law, and makes them for ever memorable. The great line is like a thing remembered from the eternal world, and

the labour of the poet is like a striving to recover that archetype. But when he achieves it there is no precision like that precision, and no certainty like that certainty.

The reader who has Addison's essays on "Paradise Lost" (which incidentally are perhaps the best introduction in the language to the art of English poetry) and acquires Mr. Grierson's edition (when complete), with the Clarendon Press facsimile, will need very few of the endless theses that are spun around everything and anything except the beauty of the work itself. This becomes all the clearer when one discovers that a critical anthology could be made from writers of eminence which would condemn, separately, almost every page in Milton, and that another anthology could be made from the same writers which would glorify, separately, the same pages. Mr. Saintsbury, for instance, prefers "Comus" to "Paradise Lost"; and I cannot help thinking that he has been influenced partly by M. Taine the second, in this; and that his predilection for a certain kind of lyrical music, of which he is amongst the most sensitive of all our critics, has led him further astray on this particular matter. For the blank verse of "Comus" is elementary compared with that of "Paradise Lost." No-

where do we find in the earlier poem that gloriously varied movement and firm structure of the paragraph, as opposed to the self-contained line ; and nowhere do we find that deep volume of music which, as Landor said, made the hexameters of Homer sound like the tinkling of cymbals on the shores of the ocean. Nor is there a glimmer of that august imaginative power which painted not only an external heaven and hell, but those which overarch and pave the vaster universe of the intellect :

" The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

Milton does this, in " Paradise Lost," with a Shakespearean power. There is one passage, in fact, which develops the music of " Hamlet " to a new purpose :

" For who would lose
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through eternity. . . ."

In fact criticism, while enlarging on Milton's innumerable debts in other directions, has overlooked—as usual—one of the greatest debts of all. Even " Comus " owes more, I think, to the " Tempest " than to the " Faithful Shepherdess," though its more superficial resemblances to the

latter have been dwelt upon so frequently. The enchanted island, the tawny sands and dapper elves—the echoes of Ariel's melody :

> " And airy tongues that syllable men's names
> On sands and shores and desert wildernesses,"

all these things are Shakespearean and of the " Tempest " ; and so, in a deeper sense, is that description of evil :

> " It shall be in eternal restless change
> Self-fed and self-consumed ; if this fail .
> The pillared firmament is rottenness
> And earth's base built on stubble."

But it is by virtue of a deeper and more tragic music than that of " The Tempest " that " Paradise Lost," from the first line to the last, is no vain or fabulous tale, but an inspired vision of truth. For M. Taine the second, Milton's heaven is an absurd vision of Whitehall ; and even his Satan, whose face " deep scars of thunder had intrenched," was a glorified drill-sergeant, bawling :

> " Vanguard, to right and left the front unfold."

It is important that we should realise how vast a difference in the appreciation of even the greatest masterpieces in the world can be made by the slightest cynical twist in the mind that contemplates them and is ready to fasten on lines

detached from their setting and alienated from their original atmosphere. Half the journalistic criticism of to-day is conducted by these methods. M. Taine's shrewdest hit of all is one that might appeal to some of our moderns ; but, from a historian who must have known what part the greatest of all books had played, merely as a model of literary style, in England, it is amazing that he should have delivered it. " Paradise Lost " can be read in any household, in the evening, he says. " It can be read to the children like the Bible."

Yes, M. Taine, Milton might once have been read in the evening, " like the Bible." It is a sharp thrust ; but we are not like that now. So here comes M. Taine's compatriot, Professor Saurat, with a large volume on Milton, of which the culminating chapter is devoted to showing that Milton's blindness was the result of syphilis :

> " A little onward lend thy guiding hand
> To these dark steps ; a little further on ! "

The reasoning upon which Professor Saurat builds his new attempt at guidance is that of a man who has been educated entirely on logical fallacies. He asks the opinion of a modern oculist on a man who has been dead for centuries, and

he receives it with a confidence which he would certainly not display in his own case unless he had been personally examined. The fact is that literature is being swamped with books in which anything and everything may be said without the slightest regard for fact ; and the first consideration is the manufacture of " new " and startling thoughts, not the strict and difficult search for truth. If there is nothing to be discovered, writers will say the opposite of what has been said before, in order to keep the printing-presses going. Professor Saurat says that Milton's daughters could not have died of tuberculosis, because this would not simultaneously explain Milton's blindness. As if it were necessary that one cause should be found for all cases. The reasoning is that of a lunatic asylum.

So much for Professor Saurat. His theory of Milton's sources is equally illogical. It is quite impossible to trace the thoughts of a poet like Milton—through all the transmutations that they have undergone, and across the abysses of " tenfold complicated change," to the recondite and occult Eastern sources which Professor Saurat examines so elaborately. The most important clue to Milton's own meaning—and it disposes at once of a great deal of the chatter about his

" theology "—is to be found in lines that are usually overlooked by the commentators :

> " Immediate are the acts of God, more swift
> Than time or motion ; but to human ears
> Cannot without process of speech be told,
> So told as earthly notion can receive."

Accepting this, as in fact M. Saurat accepts it, and accepting the story which Milton took from the Bible in this spirit, we shall not go far astray if we read it with the simplicity which Milton affirmed to be necessary to poetry. For, when we do this, the rest is added to us.

It would be as ridiculous to reject Milton on account of his " theology " as to reject Æschylus. Each uses his own imagery, and each has quite out-soared the shadow of our night and " the letter that killeth." Their creations are figures and forms of Truth, so consonant with the harmonious laws of the kingdom of the mind that we are forced to say—If these things never happened in the material world, they have happened somewhere else, in the very heart and centre of things. In some degree, we have all experienced them. Far within us resides our own lost Eden. In these latter days there has been a great lowering, a weakening of the terms in which we express ourselves, owing to our fear of what we

call "anthropomorphism." But it is better to speak of the Highest in terms of the highest that we know than in terms of the lowest. It may be said, therefore, in all seriousness, that to give us the truth, and the whole truth, about this infinite universe, to reveal its uttermost heights and depths and, in Milton's own sublime phrase, to justify the ways of God to man, there has been no attempt in these days, no shadow of an attempt, by any subsequent prose philosopher, that can be compared for one moment either with Dante's "Divine Comedy" or Milton's "Paradise Lost." We have had idealistic and materialistic philosophers of many kinds; but, for any complete presentation of the universe as a whole, we might just as well turn to the philatelists. Indeed, if the subject be considered in all its bearings, it is only the figures and forms of art, the figures and forms of the great artist that are competent to deal with it. "The strongest part of our religion to-day," said Matthew Arnold, "is its unconscious poetry." And we need not hesitate to go a step farther and say that, in the very widest and deepest sense that can be given to the words—Poetry *is* Religion. From the first line to the last in "Paradise Lost" we are moving in that purest element of poetry and religion, pure as the naked heavens, that

crystalline sea of music, which is to the storms and cross-winds of philosophy as the underlying ether whereby messages are borne to us, wireless messages, from worlds beyond our horizon, through the storms of the Atlantic. Creeds and sects have no more meaning there, and the great blind poet is more fully conscious of it than any little pessimist of to-day can be. Faith has vanished into sight for those blind eyes.

In this great quality of spiritual vision he is above any poet but one or two in history. Shakespeare excelled him in some directions ; but, in the supreme quality of spirituality, Milton out-soars him. There are only one or two passages in English—there are few in the literature of any nation—that can be compared in this respect with the opening of the third book of " Paradise Lost " ; and M. Saurat, with his charlatan's explanation of Milton's blindness, is somehow made all the more unnecessary by the supreme glory and pathos of that flight into the celestial regions :

" Hail holy light, offspring of heaven first-born,
Or of th' Eternal Co-eternal beam,
May I express thee unblamed ? since God is light,
And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from Eternitie, dwelt then in thee . . . "

BUNYAN REVISITED

"THE traditional course for a bird like me," said the Opalescent Parrot, ominously opening and closing his claws of chrysoprase, "is mechanical repetition. But, if I follow it, I find that I am merely doing what twenty million, lonely, rebellious, advanced, modern, and quite unanimous 'intellectuals' are all doing. Mechanical repetition, with absolute unanimity as to what is to be admired, and what is to be depreciated (if you are intellectually *chic*) has become the rule for human beings. I am therefore forced, as a self-respecting Parrot, to abandon the patter, and fall back on what I hitherto believed to be a human prerogative; to say occasionally a few things that no 'intellectual' would dare to say (even if it involve me publicly in the praise of an unpopular popularity); and to criticise a few things that the world at large is expected to swallow without any examination at all."

I propose to accept this reproof. There are living writers whose works are labelled before they are produced; and if, later, they belie their

labels, the matter is easily set right by a quotation cut out of the context, and cheerfully misrepresented ; a satirical line, quoted as an example of the " pretty-pretty " ; or a connecting link detached from the ideas which it connected. It would not be done wilfully, in most cases ; but merely because the labels were ready, and the conventional pigeon-holes all arranged for the specimens in the mind of our hasty intellectual, a mind which is very like an American roll-top desk, and can always be shut with a snap to hide its own confusion.

There are writers among the dead, too, who are definitely pigeon-holed for praise and blame in the same way. When their centenaries arrive we know beforehand exactly what the literary Tadpoles and Tapers are going to say about them in the *Blind Man's Journal* and the *Deaf Man's Review.* John Bunyan is in the praise pigeon-hole. If you wanted to be very *chic* you would be well advised to say, for instance, that he had a subtler gift of characterisation than Shakespeare. One doubts whether, in the "new" critical freedom of the English-speaking world, there will be anything uttered anywhere, during the Bunyan tercentenary, beyond the mechanical repetition of the old stock-phrases about the " Pilgrim's Pro-

gress." When an author has reached this stage I have observed that his most enthusiastic admirers are often stricken with a curious inability to read him ; and that, if you quote, not brief sentences detached from their context (the favourite trick of the intellectual who wishes to mislead us) but real examples of the writer, passages that would damn any author of the Victorian period for ever, his vicarious admirers are unable to grasp the relation of one sentence to another. The page becomes a complete blank to them. They stare at the passage, and in order that they may not grasp, or confess, the dreadful bungling of their paragon, they fall back on the very thing they profess to despise—*Authority* ; and that *Authority* in the case of Bunyan is the *Authority* of Macaulay, who is renowned for his accuracy, his critical discrimination, and his detachment from the Victorian period, isn't he, little ones ? *

There are living writers who, if they published a book containing only blank pages and a few punctuation marks, would be applauded rapturously for their profound sense of the Absolute and the Utter. The works would be described before-

* There were nearly two hundred agitated replies in the press to this re-valuation, and—in spite of this anticipation—one hundred and fifty-six of them solemnly quoted the one hackneyed sentence from Macaulay as their one and only argument. Even Mr. Birrell fell back upon it !

hand as their masterpiece ; " and, by the Sybil of Panzoust and the porridge-pot of Gargantua," as the Parrot said, in a flame of conviction, " This description for once would be right." There are others who, if they produced a work as great as the Divine Comedy, would be utterly condemned on the strength of a few unrepresentative lines.

It is not easy, therefore, at the present time, to take an independent view of a writer like Bunyan. The age prides itself on its independence of thought ; but its revaluations are determined by contemporary (and temporary) conventions. You may play skittles with the fame of the greatest artists of the nineteenth century. The minor artists, since they were not inhuman enough to excel, may still be overpraised. But unanimous mechanical reactions against great reputations are neither more nor less conventional than the mechanical repetition of the stock praises which, during the Bunyan tercentenary, will be heard in every journal and on every platform. It is one of the duties of a vital criticism to thrust a crowbar through all such blind wheels ; and it is at least a less easy task than to be whirled round with the convention of the moment.

But there are lambs, as well as " intellectual " lions, in the way of any attempt to deal faithfully

and critically with Bunyan ; and to the lambs one would fain be gentle. The very name of " The Pilgrim's Progress " is like a bell ringing in the mellow distance of one's own childhood. It summons up vaguely delightful visions of certain woodcuts—the fight with Apollyon, the shepherd-boy and the Delectable Mountains. It renews a thousand old associations, and recalls a thousand memories—faces, firesides, children's bookshelves. And yet—after a very careful re-reading—I feel it is almost a critical duty to say some of the things which will certainly not be said during the tercentenary celebrations.

It is the experience of most of us that the re-reading of a book beloved in childhood is often disillusioning. A careful re-reading of " The Pilgrim's Progress " has both amused and appalled me. I approached it with real affection and with every desire to recapture my old feeling about it, or what I supposed (through continual suggestion) to be my old feeling. I sought for the most delightful editions I could find, including that which gave so much pleasure (in brief extracts and through its illustrations) to Stevenson. I did not forget the brief extracts which (separated from their context by at least one man of swift imagination) made so strong an appeal during the War.

But there will be something to say later about those " trumpets " which sounded on the other side. And I was gradually forced to the conclusion that Bunyan deserved all that he got on earth.

The spirit of " The Pilgrim's Progress," taken as a whole (not of course in a few sentences detached from their setting and diverted to other ends), is one that I hesitate to characterise until I have given an illustration of what I mean. This is one of the places where readers who prefer the mechanical repetition of what others have said will of course be stricken blind, and either not read the passage or shut their minds to its revolting significance, just as they have already forgotten every sentence in my own two preceding paragraphs, which honestly described my approach to the subject.

But let the reader who prefers honesty remember first the recent agitation about the new Prayer Book, and the recent terrible fears that the reservation of the Sacrament, or even the lamp burning continually before the shrine, might lead to the wrong kind of worship. Then let the reader honestly consider this passage from " The Pilgrim's Progress," in which Bunyan puts the consecrated elements to another use, and employs a symbolism of a very different kind. I quote

the passage at length, and I doubt if any decent human being, who will really take the trouble to read it and grasp its full meaning, can think of it without a sense of disgust and shame at the inconsistency of those who quarrel with the nobler symbolism, yet can swallow this loathsome and ludicrous degradation of it :

" Now Matthew the eldest son of Christiana fell sick, and his sickness was sore upon him, for he was much pained in his Bowels, so that he was with it, at times, pulled as 'twere both ends together. There dwelt also not far from thence one Mr. Skill, an antient and well approved Physician. So Christiana desired it, and they sent for him, and he came. When he was entered the Room, and had a little observed the Boy, he concluded that he was sick of the Gripes. Then he said to his Mother, What Diet has Matthew of late fed upon ? Diet, said Christiana, Nothing but that which is wholesome. The Physician answered, This Boy has been tampering with something that lies in his Maw undigested. I tell you he must be purged, or else he will die.

" Then said Samuel, Mother, Mother, what was that which my Brother did gather up and eat, so soon as we were come from the gate ? You know that there was an Orchard on the left hand and some of the Trees hung over the wall.

" True, my Child, said Christiana, he did take thereof and eat.

" I knew, said Skill, he had eaten something that was not wholesome Food. And that Food, to wit, that Fruit, is even the most hurtful of all. It is the Fruit of Beelzebub's Orchard. I do marvel that none did warn you of it. Many have died thereof.

" Then Christiana began to cry, and she said, O naughty Boy, and O careless Mother, what shall I do for my Son ?

" Come, said Skill, do not be too much dejected. The Boy may do well again ; but he must purge and vomit.

" So he made him a Purge, but it was too weak. 'Twas said it was made of the Blood of a Goat, the Ashes of an Heifer, and with some of the Juice of Hyssop, etc.

" *When Mr. Skill had seen that Purge was too weak, he made him one to the purpose. 'Twas made* Ex Carne et Sanguine Christi. *And it was made up into Pills with a Promise or two, and a proportionable quantity of Salt. Now he was to take them three at a time fasting. When this potion was prepared, and brought to the Boy, he was loth to take it, tho' torn with the Gripes.*

" *It goes against my Stomach, said the Boy.*

" *I must have you take it, said his Mother.*

" *I shall vomit it up again, said the Boy.*"

Ere long the Boy did take the pills, and they made him " sweat," and he got rid of his " gripes " ; but I see no reason why Bunyan should avail himself of what he would have described in another as Romish Latin. Christiana had twelve boxes of these useful pills prepared, for future emergencies, out of the consecrated elements of what Bunyan himself describes as the Body and Blood of Christ. And this is the man whom Macaulay compared for his imaginative power with the author of " Paradise Lost," one of the supreme epics of the world, and

perhaps the most sublime imaginative flight into the Unseen Region, " dark with excess of bright," that the wings of the human spirit have ever achieved. Macaulay makes this statement in one of those well balanced, antithetical sentences which remind one of Wilde's epigram—that you always know the liar by his rich, rhythmical utterance. It is impossible (no matter what one's view of the sacraments may be) to think of such a passage as that quoted above without a feeling of horror that it should ever be read by little children, if it were possible for them to understand its full meaning. It is on the lowest and most squalid levels of the primitive races of Africa.

Apart from its loathsome pawing of a sacred subject, in a style which nowadays is quite mechanically described as " vigorous, plain, but never vulgar," it is ludicrous even as a moral fable. Bunyan does his best to depict both mother and child as suffering innocently at the hands of a Superior Being who has not only given them no warning, but has done everything to entrap them. This is typical. It resembles for instance that other occasion when Christian and Hopeful, being footsore, try to ease themselves by walking on the grass at the side of the road. They narrowly escape death because their gentle Prince has " on

purpose," as Bunyan says quite definitely, placed a pit there in which persons who do that kind of thing shall be "dashed to pieces"; and this when their minds are set on getting to the Celestial City at all costs. In other words, unless you kept to the strict letter of what Mr. Bunyan's sect believed you were marked for perdition. Study the fate of poor Mr. Ignorance who, both in his conversation with those vain and boastful pilgrims, Christian and Hopeful, and in his unassuming approach (without trumpets) to the Celestial City, strikes one as a far better Christian and a far more honest man. With great glee Christian sees him bound hand and foot at the gates of heaven and thrown to the fiends through the Deity's private entrance to hell. "The Pilgrim's Progress" gleefully asserts that one of the pleasures of the Celestial City, in addition to its gorgeous robes and trumpets, and glittering jewels and golden pavements, is the joy of helping to judge and condemn to hell those with whom you have not agreed upon earth. It is in fact one of those piously repulsive books which, in former generations, were used by well-meaning but foolish adults to fill the minds of little children with hideous ideas of hell-fire, and with still more hideous ideas of a treacherous, trap-laying, re-

vengeful old Deity whom any decent man would take by the scruff of the neck, and shove head-first through that smoky hole in the Celestial regions which Bunyan so charmingly depicts as the Deity's own side entrance to the place of torment.

We all know how much harm was done to religion in former generations by the crudities of popular fanaticism, and the half-witted cruelties of undeveloped minds under the influence of what they supposed to be God's grace. There was a very unpleasant side indeed to some of Cromwell's canting "Tribulation-Wholesomes" and psalm-singing "Break-every-Bone-in-his-Body Hezekiahs." One cannot help wishing that some good honest atheist had organised a jolly company of Stick-His-Head-under-the-Pump Pantagruels, who would have dealt faithfully with everyone who quoted the Old Testament through his nose. It is all very well, in these days of easy opinion, to light your pipe and concentrate your attention on the trumpets and the swords and the Old Hundredth; but it is a mistake to assume that the snufflers of texts about the damnation of their neighbours were all of them up to the level of the most disreputable of the Cavaliers.

In the eighteenth century, which had a great deal of common sense, the very name of Bunyan

evoked so much ridicule that Cowper (who admired him) was afraid to mention his name. Cowper, it will be remembered, went mad on the very subject which was nearest to Bunyan's heart —hell-fire. But the gentle Cowper applied it to himself and thought he was damned. Bunyan uttered all kinds of unpleasant things about himself; but he got very angry when anyone believed him. In fact, on those occasions he really talked almost like a man, except that he gave himself frequent testimonials on the subject of his relations with women, which is almost as intolerable as the boasting of the man who prides himself on his immoralities.

It is interesting to remember too that Dr. Johnson's admiration of Bunyan was the occasion of the one really mean act of his life, when he snubbed and refused to speak to a little child because she had not read "The Pilgrim's Progress". Dr. Johnson also was obsessed with the kind of feeling about the future life on which the crazy fears of Bunyan might have had some early and harmful influence. The dominating motive of "The Pilgrim's Progress" is fear. Not that fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom, but the fear of fire and brimstone. There is something despicable about the way in which Christian

bolts from the doomed City, leaving his wife and children behind him, and putting his fingers in his ears. No excuse is possible. Quite apart from the moral aspect, it is the blunder of a bad artist. *For Christian is depicted as having tried to persuade his family to fly with him at an earlier stage, when he did not know whither to fly. He then goes out for a walk and meets Evangelist, who imparts the secret of the way to him. Without even mentioning this to his wife and children, or trying to save them also, he immediately flies, with the secret in his pocket, while they call vainly after him.* Read it again and see for yourself, if you don't believe it. Probably most readers skip a good deal of the opening, as there are endless repetitions of what the reader has already been told. But my present criticism would not have been valid if Christian had made a single effort to impart his new knowledge before bolting like a dog who has stolen a pudding.

At every turn of every way on the journey it is fear, fear, fear. He never performs a single good act without being told that a rock is going to fall on his head or a dragon is going to bite him. He can't even stick to the perfectly straight road until he has been terrified out of his wits by giants. The only reason that he doesn't give it up and go back is (as he says again and

again) that it would be more dangerous than to go on. He only faces Apollyon because he finds that his armour doesn't meet at the back, so that it would be dangerous to run away ; and, when he fights with Apollyon, it is the worst kind of sham fight ever invented. If it were not for the illustrations even the nursery would turn up its nose at it, especially at Bunyan's remark that during the actual contest between Christian and his appalling foe he didn't once see " a pleasant look " on Christian's face.

" I didn't once see a pleasant look ! " Was there ever a phrase more suggestive of an old gossip at the annual bun-fight of a Dorcas Society ? In a humorous fight, like the affair in " Peter Pan," it would be delightful. But this is Apollyon, with a great skewer in his hand, and though one does not ask for a Homeric combat, one may very well believe that even Rabelais had the truer relish of battle, and prefer Friar John's jolly method of dealing with the enemy : " to some he beat out their brains, and bethwacked their sides till their ribs cracked with it ; to others again he unjointed the spondyles of the neck, disfigured their chaps, gashed their faces, pushed in their noses, poached out their eyes, cleft their mandibules, heaved their sciatica off its hinges,

overturned their stomachs, and laid them squat as a flounder." Now that I call a really excellent little scrap : " Didn't once see a pleasant look on his face," indeed !

It is a sham imprisonment, again, in the castle of Giant Despair. After Christian and his companion had been there for a considerable period, Christian calmly remembers that he has a key in his pocket which will open all the doors. Hopeful thinks it an excellent idea, and they open the doors and go on their way. The characterisation in the story is limited chiefly to the names which Bunyan gives his characters. But they by no means live up to their names. Mr. Ignorance, as I said above, is one of the very few modest and true Christians in the story, and Bunyan didn't know it. Mr. Ignorance gives himself no airs ; does not attempt to dogmatise, as Christian does, on questions of faith and works, but says he is content to do his best to follow in the footsteps of his Master. " We don't want deeds," howls Christian, " we want justification by faith in the tenets of my sect." " I don't want to quarrel," says Ignorance, who incidentally didn't begin the dispute, and closes it like a gentleman by going on his way. Christian, who is welcomed with trumpets and loaded with

jewels, sees poor Ignorance coming quietly up to the Celestial Gate, and rejoices that he is bound hand and foot and thrown into hell, after having undergone all the hardships of the journey to the Celestial City.

Consider again the encounter with Talkative. Christian and Faithful, who never cease talking, observe Talkative at a distance. He is walking quite alone and, unlike his critics, he is, of course, not talking. They hurry after him and with deliberate malice (after the best example of their Deity) try to induce him to talk. He does utter one or two sentences expressing a willingness to join in a friendly conversation ; and from that moment he hardly gets a word in edgeways. Christian and his friend reprove him at immense length for his garrulousness. It is one of the most ludicrous and naïve scenes that were ever imagined by an undeveloped mind. Poor Talkative behaves with extreme courtesy, though every time he opens his mouth he is drowned in a torrent of malicious reproach ; and finally he takes off his hat and says : " Gentlemen, I have no wish to quarrel with you. I prefer to walk alone." He is left, alone and silent ; and Christian and Faithful go on their way jabbering hard to one another about their own virtues and the wickedness of

poor silent Talkative. These two characters and Mr. Atheism are almost the only decent men in the whole book.

In the second part of "The Pilgrim's Progress," to match the desertion of his wife by Christian, Christiana's children get married *en route* and leave their babies at a wayside hostel for the rest of their earthly existence, so anxious are they to obtain personal salvation, and to assist at the final judgment upon their neighbours. There is an absurd confusion of ideas throughout. They see the sheep, grazing, of whom the Lord is not only the shepherd, but also apparently the butcher or the butcher's employer. And they themselves are also apparently the sheep. They also sup on a Lamb, with a capital L, that has an obvious religious significance, though Bunyan describes it as a Lamb with the accustomed Sauce belonging thereto. I will not deny that this, as the Irishman said, is "well mint." But this is the beautiful passage in which the relation of the poor human sheep to their Lord is described, by the peer of Demosthenes, Shakespeare and Milton :

"And, Sir, said Christian, pray let us see some more : So he had them into the Slaughter-house, where was a Butcher a killing of a Sheep, and behold the Sheep was quiet, and took her Death patiently. Then said the Interpreter : you must learn of this

Sheep, to suffer, and to put up with wrongs without murmurings and complaints. Behold how quietly she takes her Death, and without objecting she suffereth her Skin to be pulled over her Ears. Your King doth call you his Sheep."

"*Without objecting!*"

This may be the sturdy vernacular of the time of whose merits we have heard so much from literary men who take the surface view of the philologist. Personally I do not like Bunyan's favourite "between thee and I," to begin with: it all suggests a pavement artist's imitation of the old compassionate imagery of the Bible, from which Bunyan borrowed so freely and spoiled everything that he borrowed. Taine quotes a passage for ecstatic admiration. Every phrase in it is taken straight from the "Apocalypse," except one sentence, in which Bunyan ruins the whole by his manner of saying that the excessive beauty of heaven made Christian sick.

We can hardly wonder that religion in England has fallen on evil days when young minds have been led to believe that this crude stuff is of the best that is known and thought in the world. The mechanical repetition of the praise will go on, till the reaction comes, and then there will be a reversion to the judgment of the eighteenth century. In the meantime nothing is

more amazing than the way in which editors can set down the most hideous facts about Bunyan's intolerance, and calmly point to them as examples of the exact opposite. The introduction to the Oxford edition of "The Pilgrim's Progress" describes him as writing with extreme bitterness of the Quakers, the Ranters, the Roman Catholics, the Church of England. "One of his latest and most impressive warnings," the editor says, "was not 'to touch the Common Prayer.'" "The titles of Anabaptist, Independent, Presbyterian," Bunyan affirmed, "come neither from Jerusalem nor Antioch, but from hell or Babylon." The editor quotes this, and his very next sentence is this :

"*It was this universal charity that he expressed in his last sermon!*"

Dean Stanley went further and described him as "the teacher of the universal Church"!

It is certainly a cataleptic world.

Now—I don't know what the meaning of this arbitrary treatment of plain facts may be. But it does look as though in England we are so accustomed to the false standards of our political system that we are capable of extending our humbug even to artistic, literary and religious matters. We must have great men to revere ; so

we adopt a man of straw, on a sort of monarchical principle ; and that particular king can do no wrong. No matter what he writes or says, it is all beautiful and noble and Westminster Abbeyish. It saves a lot of " damned nonsense about merit " to have these ready-made idols. And so we get Macaulay comparing Bunyan, not only with Milton, but with Demosthenes and Shakespeare ; and so we get our Oxford editor quoting the bitterness with which Bunyan derives every sect from hell except his own, and then calmly, in the very next sentence, describing him as a being of universal charity. Small wonder that our really great men have so often dashed themselves to pieces in trying to get a glimmer of understanding into the minds of a public blandly satisfied, despite all its conventional unconventionality, to shut its eyes and its ears to everything but the sight and sound of the conventional machinery of public opinion.

" The Pilgrim's Progress " does of course hold the reader's attention, just as one may be almost spell-bound by a conversation with a half-witted person who has a startling habit of asking you sudden insane questions. One of the most horrible things ever printed is the passage in the second part, where the Interpreter, after showing

the spider on the wall to Christiana, suddenly turns to her and asks: "Are there no other spiders in this room?" "She was a woman quick of apprehension," says Bunyan, and she understands him, and the water comes into her eyes. This disgusting male bullying is hardly in the spirit of Christ as manifested to a woman who was a greater sinner; but it reveals one of the most pitiful episodes in Bunyan's life. Bunyan had seen that water in the eyes of the wife who had tried to save him from his own crazy fanaticism. He had spilt his own venom on her, and she received it in silence; and he went on his way to the Celestial City, deserting his own blind child, and thanking God that he was not as the venomous creature who stood by him so faithfully during his imprisonment. It is all written down there unconsciously in the language of piety, the piety of the long face and the yellow upturned eyes. He makes Christiana reproach herself chiefly for her behaviour to her husband. Christian himself has no regrets. It is fortunate that children like pictures, and do not penetrate below the surface of the tale. A tale in which anything may happen at any moment always appeals to the young. Three men come tumbling over a wall. You see a black man in front of you in a white

robe. You fall into a pit. You are cast into a dungeon and beaten senselessly by a giant who has fits. . . . It may all be taken by a child as a fairy-tale. But when you really get at its meaning, it is a revelation of something dreadful and primitive and insane, something that has only half emerged from the squalor of the sub-human. Caliban crying for the Celestial City may be a subject for great literature, but he is not a maker of it. As a human document, "The Pilgrim's Progress" is of enormous interest, and literary critics have confused this value with another and a very different set of values. As a work of art it is a childish scrawl—a twopenny broadsheet dipped in the cruder colours of the Puritan's reading of the Old Testament, and touching the mind and heart only accidentally, as when a careless reader discovers a reference to a sheep and its slaughter, and remembers a nobler passage in the original. The distinction between its artistic worthlessness and its real value as a human document is fundamental and absolutely necessary. Bunyan had not a single gleam of original thought or insight into the spiritual world. Compared with the Confessions of St. Augustine, his work is as a mouth-organ in the street to an orchestral symphony of Beethoven. Macaulay admitted that

as an allegory "The Pilgrim's Progress" was occasionally unsound, as when Faithful is killed by martyrdom before he reaches the River of Death. But it is always childishly muddled. The Pilgrims are continually in danger of going through the River, at a moment's notice, long before it is in sight. And the occupants of the doomed City, who do not go on pilgrimage, presumably never reach the River at all. There is a confusion throughout, in fact, between the stages of a man's temporal existence and those of his spiritual adventures. Christian leaves his wife and children behind in the City of Destruction because they cannot keep up with him spiritually. So he arrives at the River of Death, and his whole life's pilgrimage is over before theirs can begin in the second volume. They should have been companions through time, the one escaping and the other falling into spiritual dangers on the way. Vanity Fair is no better than the City of Destruction, and would give the sinners full scope. But it is useless to dwell on the incidental faults of a book of this kind.

When one looks at poor Caliban-Bunyan himself (the phrase is not used in quite the direct sense, but with recollections of "Caliban on Setebos") there are symptoms of a reversion to

type which all students of primitive religions and all asylum doctors will recognise. He wanted to pray to broom-sticks, to a bull, and to Satan. He wished to be a toad, because toads have no souls ; and he thought he was going to burst asunder like Judas. His astonishingly innocent biographers talk as if these well-known symptoms were a confirmation of his spiritual apostleship. They merely confirm our horror that the minds of little children should be fed on his hallucinations. One of the most horrible things on record, even in the annals of Puritanism, is his childish prayer that, if he went to hell, he should go there as a tormentor, and not as one of the tormented. It is no answer to say that in his more optimistic moments he forgot this forlorn hope. It is the spirit of all his work. Even this has been enthusiastically regarded by ministers of religion. All I can say to them is that they had better learn Christopher Robin, which has more real religion in it than the whole of Grace Abounding. But we cannot condemn him as he condemned a far more lovable Ignorance. He stares at us with those pitiful insane eyes, burning with little hatreds, and as we look at them, under that stunted and narrow brow, the water may well stand in our own eyes. It will not be there

through the admiration of his fine thoughts, to which his egotism would certainly ascribe it. It will be there through the pity with which his own heart was unacquainted.

* * * *

When the hubbub aroused by these remarks had subsided, the Opalescent Parrot selected a few of the more coherent replies and pointed out that they had already been answered, by anticipation, in what had been originally said.

Many of these replies ignored the distinction that had been made between the categories in which the works of Bunyan and Milton are ranked. They declared that criticism of Bunyan was only proof of a prejudice against all Puritan literature. This, of course, was hardly intelligent, in view of what had already been said about "Paradise Lost." At the very outset this work of a great Puritan poet was described as "one of the supreme epics of the world, and perhaps the most sublime imaginative flight into the Unseen Region, 'dark with excess of bright,' that the wings of the human spirit have ever achieved."

Most of the other replies invoked the authority of Lord Macaulay. Mr. Birrell invoked the authority of Mr. Bernard Shaw as well as that of Macaulay, and used somewhat violent language

about the necessity of my own brains being bashed out at the foot of the Bunyan statue. I suppose he acquired that way of looking at things in Ireland. But he did not like it to be thought that, on principle, he was opposed to revaluations, *provided, as I anticipated above, that we chose our subject from the right pigeon-hole ;* and, as he then immediately launched out into a fierce attack upon the "Vicar of Wakefield," it seemed, on the whole, advisable, both to the Opalescent Parrot and myself, to get down to relevant facts again. By facts I do not mean Lord Macaulay, or even Samuel Butler (though he will serve as an antidote to Mr. Shaw). Samuel Butler (though he spoke of the "greatness" of the "Pilgrim's Progress" on grounds which I shall discuss later, said also that "it consists mainly of a series of infamous libels upon life and things ; it is a blasphemy against certain fundamental ideas of right and wrong. The allegory halts continually. Nothing can be more carnal than the golden splendour of the Eternal City."

A thinker opposed in almost every other way to Samuel Butler, Francis Thompson, "could not tolerate the dulness and insufficiency of Bunyan's descriptions."

"In the account of the Valley of Despair," he

wrote, "Bunyan does flicker into a meagre glimmer of description; but its only effect is to leave the darkness of his fancy visible, and he flickers feebly out again. The Mouth of Hell is by the way; and, after his usual commonplace manner of vision, he introduces this tremendous idea with a flippancy, such as never surely was accorded it before." Many Catholic writers, on the other hand, accept the usual view, based on the affection they entertained in childhood for Giant Pope and Giant Pagan; for nothing, of course, could be more ludicrous than the assertion made by some generous souls that Bunyan was being condemned by the Catholics—who, much to his disgust, helped to get him out of prison.

But "authorities" especially when they differ, are not facts. Are we to weigh Macaulay against Francis Thompson, and Mr. Shaw against Samuel Butler as rival authorities, or are we to exercise our own thought and intelligence on facts in a reasoned and consistent argument?

Before going further let me give another fact; and since (as I prophesied) most of the friends of Bunyan appear to be stricken blind when they are confronted with facts which upset their

beautiful impression of him, or the ideas they have read into him, I must call upon the printer to make it clear.

When Emanuel finally takes the town of Mansoul (in Bunyan's "Holy War") certain citizens are brought up for trial as traitors. One of these is a man who believes that salvation depends on works, not upon Bunyan's theory of "election." The world would be an infinitely better place if we all held this quite simple and untheological belief to-day. But the man, who was ready to die for that simple belief, is sentenced not by Jehovah (as Mr. Birrell would suggest) but by Bunyan's representative of Jesus Christ, to be taken out and crucified.

I have been told by some critics that I ought to regard that kind of thing simply as a "good story," and that my mistake is in paying attention to the religious ideas of an author whose reputation has largely been built up, and is now being defended, by ministers of religion. Others tell me exactly the opposite, and deny that the ideas, in a story of ideas, can be dissociated from the story for critical purposes. In any case, a story in which a Christian triumphantly crucifies a good man, because he is not a theological hair-splitter, and crucifies him in the name of Jesus Christ, does not seem to me to be a good story,

either for children or adults, but simply a revelation of a piteously crude mind, warped throughout life by congenital defects of which there is ample evidence elsewhere in his work. This is my honest opinion, and if any one can answer the facts fairly and squarely, without evasion, logical fallacy, or irrelevant appeals to authority, though it be popular authority, or the authority of childish affection (aided by woodcuts), then I am ready to admit that I am wrong. At the end of my original article I gave a long list of the symptoms of Bunyan's mental weakness ; and among these I included his childish wish that, if he were damned, he might go to hell as a tormentor, rather than as one of the tormented. A Nonconformist minister fastens on this as evidence of Bunyan's delightful boyish character. What does he make of the passage which I have criticised on the previous page? The mind revealed there is the mind that gave form to that childish " wish." It is the same mind that—as Bunyan describes in " Grace Abounding "—when he stooped to pick up a pin, heard a voice hissing in his ear a command to sell Jesus Christ for that pin. " Sell him ! Sell him ! " Any doctor knows all about that sort of thing.

Bunyan had the perverse courage of the

fanatic in his encounters with his fellow-men ; but this did not prevent him from trying to put the wrong kind of fear—the fear of fire and brimstone, rather than the fear of God—into others.

With regard to the boxes of pills, which were to be made out of the Body and Blood of Christ, " with a little salt," and taken by the little boy as a purge for " the gripes," it is not a question of " coarse language," but of its lack of a sense of what is sacred in Bunyan's own religion. Nobody has answered the plain facts about the characterisation in " The Pilgrim's Progress ". I analysed it at length, showing that it chiefly depended upon the names given to the characters—after the fashion of Everyman, from whom Bunyan borrowed the machinery—and that they did not live up to their names. It is one of the worst of the devices of the older dramatists ; but, in Ben Jonson, Mr. Fastidious Brisk does live up to his name. Bunyan often gives us nothing else. Ignorance, like the man who believed in works, was content to follow the footsteps of his Master, and Christian, with glee, after being welcomed by those " trumpets," sees Ignorance (a far better Christian) thrown into hell. After all, none of us, not even Bunyan, knows very much ; and I

cannot help remembering (when Ignorance stands up in the Eternal City) those other words, " him that cometh unto Me, I will in nowise cast out ". Talkative hardly gets in a word with Christian and Faithful. I have seen wild praise given to the character of the Young Woman called Dull. The phrase is amusing to a modern reader ; but that phrase is all that we have of her. When Mr. Birrell calls Mr. Worldly-Wiseman one of the greatest characters in fiction, one can only suppose him to be recognising the obvious fact that the world is full of worldly-wise people, and that Bunyan is thus praised for a useful phrase-label rather than his portraiture either of a type or an individual. Mr. Birrell attaches the label to my own view that there was something despicable about Christian's desertion of his wife and children. My view is based, not on policy, but on the ordinary motives of human nature—and those affections which most decent men would rather be damned than abandon for a personal advantage. In the " Heavenly Footman " Bunyan makes his own point of view in the desertion only too clear. He points out that Lot kept on running, even though his wife was turned into a pillar of salt, and *that he did not once look back even to see what had become of her.* Bunyan thus exposes

his own misreading even of the Old Testament. Lot might have been damned for looking back at the Cities of the Plain, but hardly for looking back, with a little concern, to see what had become of his wife.

If these things can be answered, let them be answered. But it is senseless to call Bunyan a "great writer," and to adduce only reasons which even the Opalescent Parrot can riddle through and through and knock over like ninepins. I am told, as I said I should be told, to read the passage about the trumpets. I paid my tribute to the gifts of the man who made that quotation famous during the War (apart from its context), and I have no doubt that many of my critics borrowed it from his pages. On the whole, the Dean of Winchester's reply was the only serious criticism. He has written one of the best short biographies of Bunyan, and he admits among many other things that Bunyan's God was almost the God of hate and that Bunyan had an undeveloped mind. He makes it very clear that "The Pilgrim's Progress" cannot be placed in the great æsthetic category in which "Paradise Lost" and the "Divine Comedy" of Dante are ranked among the supreme achievements of the human intellect. Indeed, like many others, he admits almost the

whole of my argument, and yet, like Samuel Butler, says that Bunyan is a " great writer."

I am now anxious to discover what the qualities are which constitute that particular kind of " greatness." I believe that " greatness " has been confused with " interest " of a different kind, and, in literary circles, with a *naïveté* of language which sounds " fresh " to the modern ear.

None of my critics has noticed the distinction I made—

That Bunyan's work is " of immense interest," and, of course, permanent historical interest as " a human document," a record of a certain crude type of mind in a certain period, a piteous record that (as I said myself) may well make the water stand in our own eyes ; but not coming into the categories of great art or æsthetics.

Just as readers have read into the names of its characters all that they think those names imply, so have they confounded the beautiful idea of a pilgrimage to the Celestial City with Bunyan's treatment of it. Nobody attacks the idea of that pilgrimage. Bunyan did not invent the Celestial City. Wherever his language has beauty, it comes directly from the Bible. Occasionally in a detached sentence it has a sound into which we

can put our own emotions. But usually the language of the Bible is degraded by his handling, as when the citizens of Mansoul, while the types of Christ are unfolded to them, shout, " This is the Lamb ; this is the Sacrifice ; this is the Red Cow ! "

This, I say, is a little Hottentottish. In what another correspondent called my ludicrous description of Christian's armour Bunyan is responsible for the ludicrous touch, and I deliberately called attention to it as typical. Bunyan does say that Christian would have run away but for the fact that it would not be safe because his armour did not meet behind. And Bunyan does make fear the dominating motive throughout, in a way which, with " Grace Abounding " before us, we cannot dismiss as merely the fear of sin. Bunyan is talking of the horrible sin of bell-ringing and his own experiences, not in allegory.

" Before this I had taken much delight in ringing, but my conscience being tender, I forced myself to leave it, yet my mind hankered ; wherefore I should go to the steeple-house and look on, though I durst not ring. But quickly after, I began to think how, if one of the bells should fall ? Then I chose to stand under a main beam, thinking there I should stand sure, but then I should think again, should the bell fall with a

swing, it might first hit the wall and then, rebounding upon me, might kill me for all this beam. This made me stand in the steeple-door; and now, thought I, I am safe enough; for, if a bell should fall, I can slip out. But then it came into my head how, if the steeple itself should fall. And this thought did continually so shake my mind that I durst not stand, but was forced to flee, for fear the steeple should fall on my head."

This is not a wrestling with sin. It is wrestling with a congenital defect of the mind, and is quite unlike anything in the imagination of the sublime Puritan, Milton, who wrote as ever in his great Taskmaster's eye.

Compared with "Grace Abounding," the confessions of St. Augustine are as a symphony of Beethoven to a street song on a mouth-organ. Compared with the vision of Augustine and his mother at the end of that book, Bunyan's works have not a gleam of spiritual insight. The earth and the seventh heaven are not further apart.

Compare Bunyan's "trumpets" with this passage from St. Augustine's Confessions:

"We said that 'If the tumult of the flesh were hushed; hushed these shadows of earth, sea, sky; hushed the heavens and the soul itself, so that the soul

should pass beyond itself and not think of itself; if all dreams were hushed, and all sensuous revelations, and every tongue, and every symbol, and whatsoever exists only in passing away (since if any could hear, all these say *We made not ourselves, but He made us that abideth for ever*) and He alone speak, not by them, but by Himself Whom in these things we love, were not this *Enter into thy Master's joy.*"

It is marred both by translation and quotation, but that is what I mean by the spiritual vision of which there is no gleam in Bunyan.

The results of this controversy are as follows :

1. It is admitted by Bunyan's best exponent in the symposium that his God is almost a God of hate.

2. It is admitted that he had an undeveloped mind, and his biographers offer conclusive evidence (from which I have quoted here) that it was warped by congenital defects.

3. His story of " The Pilgrim's Progress " does not come into the great æsthetic category to which " Paradise Lost " belongs. (This is again admitted.) Its characters are false to their names, and its ideas (upon which the conduct of the story depends) will not bear examination.

4. Bunyan's work is of immense interest as a " human document," a pathetic exposure of the man himself, almost as complete in its own sphere as the diary of Pepys in a very different sphere. It will live for that reason ; not because it ranks with the masterpieces of art which, through their art and its symbolic values, transcend their own age.

This distinction has not been observed by any critic, and it is the true distinction, and indicates the true historical perspective.

TROMPOLOGICAL PERIPATETICS

"And now, what is wrong with our philosophers?" said the Opalescent Parrot, suddenly rising and flapping his wings into a prismatic mist. "Why is it that they cannot change half a crown into sixpences without describing the process as 'a catallaxis' and adding 'Whateley' in parenthesis? Why is it that *even on quite ordinary occasions, when there is not the slightest ground for the pretence that a special profundity requires a new coinage of technical words, they break out into lexiconitis?*" We may as well italicise these words in anticipation of an ancient stock-excuse which is as untrue as it is mechanically certain to be made. A recent distinguished writer (Dr. Laird) on the *Idea of Value*, explaining that there is no need to depart from the practice of everyday speech, points to the three words "value," "worth" and "good" as not less useful for his purposes than the phrase "affective-volitional-meaning," which really means nothing at all. But he goes on, immediately, to speak of his three simple words as "members of this triad," thus spinning them into

an imaginary system, a sort of molecule, of which he says, " within the triad " (he likes it so much that he repeats it) " ' value ' is the most important." Why could he not have said, quite simply, " Of these three words ' value ' is the most important " ? And why " members " ? In this instance, the disease is not fatal. But it is obvious that a philosopher who plays with words in this way is in danger, when he really does get into deeper subjects, of spinning interminable webs of ambiguous words around innumerable abstractions. Dr. F. H. Bradley, the author of " Appearance and Reality," spun whole chapters, on more than one occasion, out of a similar misuse of language. He wrote whole chapters, for instance, on such questions as this : When we say " the flower is blue," do we mean that the flower *is* nothing but the colour—blueness ? Now, in English idiom, that little word is may be used in several senses. Change it for a verb that gives the obvious sense of the idiom, say that " the flower HAS a blue colour," or even " has the effect on *us* of blueness," and Dr. Bradley's chapter dissolves. The problem was really that of the " substance " and " accidents " which the Schoolmen analysed long before him ; and there he had something worthy of elucidation. But he continually misstates

his own problem and converts it into a mere grammatical quibble, based on a misuse of words, or the attempt to treat an idiom literally. It is for this reason that his work has had so little influence abroad compared with that of Berkeley. Translation kills the quibble based on verbal ambiguities.

One cannot help distrusting the obscurer parts of a work when one sees a tortuous mental habit complicating what is comparatively (and might be entirely) straightforward and clear. One is all the more distrustful when one suddenly encounters in plain language (doubtless when the author forgot his profession) statements or questions so illogical that they seem hardly worth debating. Should a house built exactly as the builder intended to build it be called "perfect"? Ask any freeholder in England that question of Dr. Laird's; and, unless he is a lunatic, he will laugh at your ideas of "value," and tell you to talk sensibly. But your modern philosopher will devote page after page to such discussions, in language like this:

The timological question—"timology" is not defined, but it probably means the science which deals with your feelings of awe in the presence of the house—*may be subordinated to the economic*

or catallactic axiology of the brickfields; in this case, the appetence of the occupant, hypothetical or otherwise, must be regarded as a contributory, though subjective, complex. But this complex can hardly be regarded as contributory, if the occupant himself be 'non compos mentis.' So that before we can analyse the original question we must devote a chapter to the psychological investigation of the occupant's subjective power of distinguishing between his own pleasure in reading Shakespeare and the pleasure experienced by a duck in diving into weeds. We must recognise, too, that the use of the word 'weeds'—there is no reference here to Virginia—indicates a timological judgment which we must guard against introducing by a prejudicial complex into a problem still unsettled. The problem resolves itself, therefore, into a triad, each member of which . . ."

In the meantime, the freeholder has put up a notice: "THIS HOUSE FOR SALE"; and I may as well continue with a direct quotation from the same distinguished philosopher, in somewhat simpler language:

"Intellect, fancy, mountain climbing, warm baths, ludo and literature, spillikins and sculpture, may all be enjoyed, and are very different in their qualities."

There, of course, we may heartily agree, and

may also add "spinach, dominoes, the Venus of Milo, and getting your hair cut." But our philosopher doesn't want us to agree, or his book would come to an end, so he continues :

"If, however, as language suggests, we pretend to find a common element called pleasure in all these different pursuits, have we any sufficient reason either for asserting or for denying that this common element itself may differ in quality ?"

Differ from what ? I suppose he means that it may "vary," and therefore, to the extent of its variation, depart once more from what is common to all cases. But he set out with something which *was* common to all cases, and how can *this* vary ? We must admit that by his method of statement here he has given himself something to unravel. Incidentally, is "intellect" a "pursuit" ? A little later he speaks of one thing being "more perfect" than another, when elementary grammar would have saved him from a philosophical problem which need never have been set. There are no degrees in "perfection." It is possible, of course, for a thing to be "perfect" in its own sphere and yet to be of less value (not "less perfect") than another. But, if you insist on the right use of words, some of these huge volumes of philosophy would shrink to very small dimensions.

In the passage quoted above, the reader will note how the way is prepared for further immense debate by the ambiguous wording of the paragraph—the word "pretend," for instance, and the assumption that, because we use a single word in a hundred different contexts, there actually is a common element in all its applications which is really worth discovering—the common element in that "triad," our appreciation of Beethoven, of spinach, and a hair tonic. This allows the happy philosopher to shoot out in all directions. There is no limit, absolutely none (but the amount of paper and ink in the world), to the possible digressions on the one profound problem, which any child of ten would solve more abruptly, and far more satisfactorily for itself. Here is an example of one digression. The words are an exact quotation:

"Wherever there is pleasure there is liking, and there is a quality of sweetness; *I do not, of course, mean the taste of saccharine.*"

Now, quite apart from the fact that the vague word "liking" requires more definition even than "pleasure," it is quite useless for Tromposophers to assert that the language of Addison, Huxley and Newman, is inadequate, if Tromposophers also find it necessary to drop from their

giddy heights into such childlike parentheses, by way of explanation. It is useless for the Tromposopher to write, "In the supra-lexiconian expetition of Beauty by the timological artist, there is no implication but one—his supra-rational appetence"; and then, suddenly, to add, "Eggs, of course, are a different question, and are preferable poached."

Then off goes the Tromposopher (French, *tromper*) to show how another Tromposopher (who has written a book on the Meaning of the Meaning of Meaning) ties himself up in merely verbal difficulties for the pleasure (in which, let us hope, there is also liking) of disentangling himself at sea-serpentine lengths through ten thousand logical fallacies. Tromposophers have often a fine contempt nowadays for those Schoolmen of the Middle Ages, who knew what they believed, and built up their systems like great cathedrals of harmonious philosophy. The Angelic Doctor may have over-elaborated some of his detail, but there was a unity, a strength, and a majesty in the whole structure. It really meant something for its own age, and is capable of transfiguration into our own, because its principles are true. In our modern Tromposophers, it is no exaggeration to say that all is chaos and a sea of words misused.

They give us, not the clear results of thought, but the unravelling of their own thinking processes, all the grammatical pitfalls into which they stumble, and all the spider's webs in which they wrap each separate problem as it arises from their own ambiguous use of words. The painful fact is that these huge volumes (practically all of which are devoted to the "disvaluation" of other Tromposophers) all disagree with each other on almost every possible point. A Tromposopher has only to say, "In my view, value is an abstraction," for another Tromposopher to reply, "On the contrary, it is the only reality." In fact, this is how the books are made. You simply disagree with all the others on every single point; and, as the exact meaning of the terms employed is never agreed upon, nobody on earth can say who is right, even if the point were worth discussing, which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, it isn't.

The tragedy is that these books are produced by men of some talent. Count Hermann Keyserling has just published two huge volumes of philosophy, one called "The Recovery of Truth," which, if ever you believed anything at all, aims at finally shattering that belief; and the other called "The Creative Understanding,"

presumably because it is entirely critical, and nobody on earth can really understand it. In one of these books Count Keyserling makes out an elaborate case for astrology. In fact, by the use of words and abstractions, as they are used in these books, a case could be made out for Solipso-Gollywollogy (which means that the only supreme Reality in the Universe is a Gollywog, and that everything else is his dream). There seems to be nothing more certain than that the higher intellect of Europe has fallen into complete confusion, with the exception of that vital part of it which still holds to the philosophy of Christianity as it has developed through the ages. That philosophy still remains the only satisfactory source of real answers to the riddles of the Universe. Those who hold by it find it developing, harmoniously, in all directions. Outside there are, fortunately, multitudes of unintellectual people whose practical common-sense holds civilisation together for the time being ; but, for the rest, our philosophers bear witness to the desperate plight of European culture. Here is the intellect of Europe diving into an abysmal waste-paper basket, to drown in bottomless depths of words, words, words. Axiology ! Timology ! And now, finally, Peripatetic Tromposophy.

GEORGE MEREDITH

FEBRUARY 12TH, 1828—MAY 18TH, 1909

"THE centenary of the birth of George Meredith," remarked the Opalescent Parrot, "finds him under a temporary cloud of eclipse. This, little ones," the beautiful bird went on, "is very proper, and quite in accord with the convention."

There was an interruption here, for one of the intelligentsia endeavoured with a lump of sugar to make the Parrot say "gesture," "amusing" and "pure poetry." To which the amazing creature replied by taking the sugar and screeching with unholy mirth, "Get along with you! Don't try to come that over me!"

"Parrots live for ages," the bird continued at last, "and when Meredith died I remember you were all talking about that 'august figure,' just as a week or two ago . . . ah, well, there was a very different story to tell then. And in a decade and a half there will be yet another story to tell when the Hardy centenary falls due; and then I shall have to remind you of what you said a few weeks ago.

"But the greater Victorians—Dickens and Tennyson—were never beclouded quite so successfully. It was only in certain merely 'literary' sets that they—being among the world's greatest artists—were utterly condemned; and this depreciation did not affect very intelligent people, or simple and true people, or parrots that merely remember, anywhere. It was only too obviously due to something like the feeling that a jerry-builder in search of a quick reputation must sometimes entertain when he is confronted with St. Paul's (Dickens) or the Parthenon (Tennyson). It had as little effect on their fame as a squirt of tobacco-juice from a drunken sailor against the Rock of Gibraltar. While Shakespeare and Virgil stand, these also stand; for the qualities that give permanence are theirs, and there the matter ends, in a region utterly above and beyond the changes of fashion and even the rise and fall of nations.

"With Meredith to-day, as with Hardy to-morrow, the case is different. Neither is among the world's greatest, and neither can defy the winds of opinion with such impunity. The permanence of Hardy's fame depends on certain qualities in his novels, but it is exactly the opposite with Meredith. In his novels one sees the

characters through a veil of phrases, a veil almost as fantastic as that through which one sees the characters of Sidney's 'Arcadia.' Not even the beauty of the cherry-tree under which Vernon lies asleep in the 'Egoist'; not even the love-scene on the river in 'Richard Feverel'; not even that twitch of the fingers, exquisite as it is, with which 'Diana of the Crossways' leaves us, can keep these novels alive as a whole.

"But once, once, there came a poem, a flower of the mind, that for sustained ecstasy and music it is difficult to match in the love-poetry of the world.

"'Darker grows the valley, more and more forgetting;
So were it with me, if forgetting could be willed.
Tell the grassy hollow that holds the bubbling well-spring,
Tell it to forget the source that keeps it filled. . . .'

"He worked over that poem until it seemed (as with all great poetry) that he had step by step discovered its eternal and inevitable form. It is more like a thing remembered than a thing composed. It sings like a skylark above the flowers, while the Mother of the dews, the dark-eyelashed Twilight, is descending on the valley. It is lucid and simple, as all great work must be, and the words are the perfect expression of the thought,

in sound and imagery. One of the loveliest pieces of onomatopœia in the language is that—

" ' Doves of the firwood walling high our red roof,
Through the long noon coo, crooning through the coo.
Loose droop the leaves, and down the sleepy roadway
Somewhere pipes a chaffinch. Loose droops the blue.'

Moreover, it is one of the happiest poems in English literature, for, through its musical ecstasy, it attains to certainties that cannot be expressed in any logical form, yet are the crowning assumption of its terrestrial joy.

" ' Could I find a place to be alone with heaven
I would speak my heart out. Heaven is my need.
Every woodland tree is flushing like the dogwood,
Flashing like the whitebeam, swaying like the reed.
Flushing like the dogwood crimson in October ;
Streaming like the flag-reed south-west blown ;
Flashing as in gusts the sudden lighted whitebeam ;
All seem to know what is for heaven alone.'

" There are other poems," the Parrot continued, " which—if I were a superior person, desiring to indicate my own superiority, and thereby placing myself in the lower categories—I should instantly prefer. ' Modern Love,' for example, which is the antiphonal voice to ' Love

in the Valley,' and has tragedy in it, of the dust-and-ashes kind. But great tragedy is of another kind. In one way or another it is always a renunciation of the temporal for the eternal, never an acceptance of the dust. Meredith's 'Woodland Peace,' with its exquisite refrain—

"'Sweet as Eden is the air,
And Eden-sweet the ray,'

conveys a truer philosophy, and though, in prose, he often seemed to corroborate the hopeless schools, in his living music he strikes the note that will endure.

"'We children of Beneficence
Are in its being sharers;
And whither vainer sounds than whence
For word with such wayfarers.'

"In this passage, the 'child of process' recognises the nature of the way almost as definitely as his sister-poet, Alice Meynell, in one of the greatest of her brief lyrics.

"'I'll not reproach
The Way that goes, my feet that stir.
Access, approach,
Art Thou, Time, Way and Wayfarer.'

And though he never formulated his faith, his very questioning—'Into the breast that gives the rose, shall I with shuddering fall?'—had more

conviction in it than many an open statement. It will always seem odd that the Westminster Abbey which opened its doors wide to a powerful writer who, in his complete pessimism 'lowered (as Meredith affirmed) the vitality of the race,' should have primly shut those doors in the face of one who (whatever the fate of his fiction may be) certainly gave us, in poetry, something of the music that can never die. His universe was an infinitely subtler affair than that of the other. It was not worked by strings ; and its inhabitants were not jack-a-clocks ; but, at his greatest, he had a sublime vision of the law that governed it.

"'On a starred night Prince Lucifer uprose,
Tired of his dark dominion swung the fiend
Above the rolling ball in cloud part screened
Where sinners hugged their spectre of repose.
Poor prey to his hot fit of pride were those.
And now upon his western wing he leaned,
Now his huge bulk o'er Afric's sands careened,
Now the black planet shadowed Arctic snows.
Soaring through wider zones that pricked his scars
With memory of the old revolt from Awe.
He reached a middle height, and at the stars,
Which are the brain of heaven, he looked and sank.
Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank,
The army of unalterable law.'

"It is a magnificent picture, though it illustrates the difficulty which all those who stand aloof from the slow development of the main body of

religious philosophy must always encounter in their intellectual flight. The stars, for instance, are not—in any possible scheme of thought—'the brain of heaven.' But his universe was, at least, not a mechanical affair. He had not abandoned the anthropomorphic merely to plunge into the mechanomorphic. If all things were governed by law, he found his analogy not in the machine which is, after all, made by hands, but in the music which is discovered by the spirit. We are not pulled by strings in his 'monism,' but swayed by music, with its infinitely more subtle and spiritual laws and influences.

"'Is the universe one immense organ that rolls
From devils to angels? I'm blind with the sight.
It pours such a splendour on heaps of poor souls.'

Such a splendour, indeed, that he forgets, for a moment, his customary desire to disguise the simplicity of the thought that occurs to him; and he has the courage to add:

"'I might try at kneeling with Molly to-night.'"

"He cannot be acquitted," the Parrot continued, "of his share in the development of the false 'originality' which has crept over modern literature like a blight. It is significant that whenever he deliberately tries to avoid what

superior persons might call 'commonplace' he wrecks even his poems. He stultifies his own aim and falls short of the greatest because, by quirks and turns in the expression, he is avoiding simplicity, and therefore preventing himself from sincerely expressing what is in his mind. The difference is obvious if one compares his lines on the 'children of Beneficence' with a stanza by one of the greatest of English poets, in which a similar idea is embodied with a symbolism as mellow and simple as that of a sunset sky :

"'What? You are stepping westward. Yea
'Twould be a wildish destiny,
If we who thus together roam
In a strange land and far from home
Were in this place the guests of chance.
Yet who would stop or fear to advance,
Though home or shelter he had none,
With such a sky to lead him on?'"

"By the bye," the Parrot concluded, "I don't suppose you moderns and superior persons would recognise that quotation. We parrots don't expect much of you in the way of memory, but they are not by a Victorian. They are by Wordsworth. Yes, little ones, the same man who wrote 'Drink, pretty creature, drink.' You know *that*, of course, for nowadays we judge a man's work by the worst we can find in it. Now, it is useless for

me to acquire the language of this hour, for parrots live a long time, and I may be expected to say something a hundred years hence. I shall not say ' gesture.' I shall not say ' pure poetry.' I shall not even say ' amusing,' for I am sometimes really moved by a poem, and not at all superior to it. But I will say, ' Go home and get someone who really understands English verse to read " Love in the Valley " to you.' "

The strange bird then tucked its head beneath an iridescent wing, and proceeded to meditate until the next centenary.

KEATS AND HIS DEBTORS

No reader can fail to feel the spaciousness, the shining wonder, of the lines in which Keats records his own first impressions of another great poet. They are perhaps the best introduction that could be made to his own poetry, as well as to all those other " realms of gold."

> " Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken ;
> Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
> He stared at the Pacific ; and all his men
> Looked at each other, with a wild surmise,
> Silent, upon a peak in Darien."

They are among the most perfect lines in the whole range of literature, and the picture is unsurpassed for beauty, splendour and vividness.

The reader will note, for instance, the exquisite pictorial effect of the word " swims " ; the way in which the stress of the clause falls on the word " stared " ; the vivid suggestion of the movement in the next line, with the stress on the word " looked," falling on the first syllable and thereby intensifying it ; and, finally, the loneliness, the

great distance of romance, and the dying away of the music on the word " Darien." It is work of this kind that justified Matthew Arnold in his statement that Keats had obtained his wish to be among the English poets after his death ; for " he is with Shakespeare."

But he was not always on this very high level. Most of the great English poets are distinguished from the minor poets by the fact that they wrote much that could easily be ridiculed by writers who were merely discreetly insignificant. Almost any clever writer can avoid the mistakes of " Endymion," without achieving its beauties. Sir Edmund Gosse once went so far as to write :

> " If we could dare to write as ill
> As some whose voices haunt us still,
> Even we, perchance, might call our own
> Their deep enchanting undertone."

But one doubts whether it has ever been merely a matter of daring.

Dozens of anthologies are published to-day in which there is nothing that could be ridiculed as passages in " Endymion " were ridiculed both at the time of its publication and later. But it is also true that none of these anthologies contains anything so memorable as the single line,

" A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,"

or as the Hymn to Pan. There is a reason, of course, for this. Poetry, in the great poets, is a vital spring, not merely a discreet composition, cunningly devised to give none of its author's weaknesses away ; to evade judgment ; and to win a factitious reputation from the fashion of a moment. Almost any clever undergraduate can do that. But in a poet like Keats exactly the opposite happens. He pours himself out in " Endymion " ; and he knows only too well that he has said much that, with more experience, he might have said better; much that superior persons, priding themselves on the greater refinement of their reserve, would deprecate ; and it is for just this reason that he suffers at the hands of little men. At the same time, the preface to " Endymion," and the preface to " Hyperion " constitute a tragic indictment of the evil spirit that has sullied the whole record of our great literature, the malignant spirit that strikes at the sensitive creation of beauty, very much like a flock of sparrows attacking a thrush that has broken its wing, and pecking it to death. Keats died young, and the sense of his imminent death pervades all his poetry. It is the darkness in the ode on the nightingale, through which he gropes, unable to see what coming flowers are at his feet.

It adds poignance to the cry in the ode on the Grecian Urn :—

" For ever wilt thou love and she be fair."

It is his own thirsting fever that makes him long for

" A draught of vintage that hath been
Cooled a long age in the deep-delvéd earth."

In such work as this, however, and in his " Hyperion " he had acquired a mastery—despite his short life—that placed him as a poet among those who are " not born for death."

But even in some of his earliest work there was enough poetry to kindle the minds of some of the greatest of those who followed him. The beautiful poem beginning

" I stood tip-toe upon a little hill "

is full of exquisite touches. Immediately after two lines which he borrows, in part, from Shakespeare, he paints the following picture of a stream :

" Where swarms of minnows show their little heads
Staying their wavy bodies 'gainst the streams,
To taste the luxury of sunny beams
Temper'd with coolness. How they ever wrestle
With their own sweet delight, and ever nestle
Their silver bellies on the pebbly sand.
If you but scantily hold out the hand
That very instant not one will remain."

His debt to Shakespeare has been noticed. It has not been noticed, I think, that Tennyson, in turn, based one of the most beautiful similes in the Idylls of the King on those early lines of Keats. In "Geraint and Enid" Tennyson wrote of

> "a shoal
> Of darting fish, that on a summer morn
> Adown the crystal dykes of Camelot
> Come slipping o'er their shadows on the sand,
> But if a man who stands upon the brink
> But lift a shining hand against the sun
> There is not left the twinkle of a fin
> Betwixt the cressy islets white in flower."

Many other poets owe even greater debts to Keats. The "Scholar-Gipsy" and "Thyrsis" of Matthew Arnold, both in the form of their stanza and the cadence of their music, are modelled on the odes of Keats, and especially on his ode to Autumn. These lines might well be mistaken for a description of the wandering Scholar-gipsy himself:

> "Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
> Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
> Thee sitting careless on a granary floor
> Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind,—
> Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep
> Drowsed with the fume of poppies—"

Matthew Arnold, too, writes with the very same tone:

" Screened is this nook o'er the high, half-reaped field. . . .
Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies peep."

And again, he sees the Scholar-gipsy " leaning backward in a pensive dream," a heap of flowers in his lap, and describes how shepherds had caught glimpses of him, as Keats caught glimpses of that other symbolical figure. The late professor of poetry at Oxford derives this particular vein in Arnold from the Sicilian Muse :

" But ah, of our poor Thames she never heard !
And we should tease her with our plaint in vain."

But the Muse who inspired these verses had heard more of the Thames than even Swinburne realised in his comment upon them. The line of Keats in the " Grecian Urn " :

" Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought,"

has no accidental similarity. The true origin of this particular vein in the scholar-poet was close at hand, at home, at our own doors (where so many critics forget to look), in the work of a London poet, born in comparative poverty, and with few of what are called " advantages." Cadence by cadence, syllable by syllable, the scholar-poet followed the music of Keats, whose

death at the age of twenty-five drew from Shelley the most splendid tribute ever paid by one great poet to another :

" The soul of Adonais like a star
Beacons from the abode where the eternal are."

The crude youth was the fountain-head. The polished scholar, with his exquisite reserves, and his fastidious abstention from all excess and exaggeration, was the derivative echo, an echo that will live in the memory of literature ; but, for all its beauty, still an echo.

THE TERCENTENARY OF FRANCIS BACON

"THE worst thing of all," said Francis Bacon, "is the apotheosis of error." It is one of those "apophthegms" which have been acclaimed as among the most glorious jewels in the crown of Philosophy; and, whether the acclaim be deserved or not, the "apophthegm" has a special applicability to the tercentenary of Francis Bacon himself.

Macaulay rejoiced that the lot of the valetudinarian had been made easier by the results of the Baconian method. Perhaps he had in mind that other remarkable utterance of the great Father of Modern Science :—

"*It is said that the guts or skin of a wolf, being applied to the belly, do cure the colic. It is true that the wolf is a beast of great edacity and digestion and so, it may be, the parts of him comfort the bowels.*"

For Francis Bacon is the supreme instance in English history of a figure robed and crowned with error. Errors of every kind (from the hard, bright, shallow judgments of Macaulay to the

pathetic futilities of those who believe that Bacon wrote the "Faërie Queene" and "Hamlet"), follies of every kind, fly to him as iron filings to a magnet. This may be an ironical judgment upon him for his dismissal of the real magnetic discoveries of Gilbert, whose real experiments led directly to the electrical world of to-day. A large section of the human race prefers hocus-pocus to reality; and, in a world where most people take their opinions at second-hand, their craving is easily satisfied. Nothing is easier than to avoid real thought by selecting a convenient figure to symbolise the achievements of an age. It seems to be almost certain that, abroad, the real achievements of Roger Bacon have been added to Francis, through mere confusion or association of the names; and though Macaulay, of course, knew better, nobody can read his essay carefully without noting a vague wool-gathering association of the same kind. Why else, for instance, does he drag in that most "beneficent" of all inventions—gunpowder? He attributes it to Roger Bacon. But why dwell upon it at such length?

By a kind of mental shorthand the scientific achievements of three centuries are attributed to the "Baconian method." In one passage of his

famous essay in black and white, Macaulay does attribute every material benefit conferred upon mankind to the philosophy of Bacon, whether those benefits accrued before or after the great man's birth. Even Macaulay could not maintain, of course, that all useful inventions began in Bacon's lifetime. Science increases its wealth by compound interest ; and progress was necessarily slower in the early ages. But the man who first made a wheel made a great contribution to the mechanism of civilisation. He achieved it by what is quite arbitrarily called the " Baconian method."

By suggesting that Bacon made no personal contribution to what was achieved by the " inductive method " (which he did not invent) Macaulay merely confuses any thoughtful reader who wishes to know exactly what it was that entitles Bacon to his apotheosis. The confusion thickens when Macaulay cheerfully points out that even Bacon's exposition of his method (our last hope) is quite useless. Bacon himself, indeed, did his best to demonstrate this. For what did he achieve, even as a mere logician, with the infallible new instrument which was to enable every man to arrive at the greatest results, without a spark of genius or imagination, provided that he

followed the rules and never indulged in hypotheses (one of the most fruitful sources of discovery) ?

Whenever he had an opportunity of advancing the august cause of which he has been proclaimed the leader he struck a direct blow at it. He described Copernicus as "a man who thinks nothing of introducing fictions of any kind into nature." He not only rejected the Copernican theory with contempt, but he rejected it in the very face of the discoveries of Galileo. Lord Bacon, so eloquent in his dismissal of popular error, pointed to the popular conviction that the earth did not move as one of his chief reasons for that rejection. He asserted that the theory was due to a desire to make prettily rounded circles out of the movements of the heavenly bodies ; and he did this in the very face of the discoveries of Kepler, who, with infinite patience, had worked out the true elliptical course of the planets.

To turn from the works of Bacon to those of Galileo is like passing from the crudities of a mediæval physician to the clear-cut efficiency of a Pasteur. In all his verbose attempts to put scientific thought and religious authority in their right places Bacon never rivalled the terse epigram of Galileo : *The Bible teaches us how to go*

to heaven. It does not teach us how the heavens go. There speaks your true modern ; and there, not in the ponderous " Advancement of Learning," one hears the voice of the great new age.

Moreover, in his treatment of the discoveries of Galileo, Bacon contradicted all the rules of what is called his own method. So far from displaying caution at first, and then, after a process of testing, arriving by infallible steps at the truth, he did exactly the opposite. His first impulse was to welcome the discovery of the telescope. Nine years later he became suspicious of it. He was ready to attribute the things it revealed, for which an older contemporary had been fighting his age, to a flaw in the instrument. Surely, in those nine years, the Superhuman Father of Modern Science might at least have looked into the matter before he committed his adverse thoughts to paper. A busy lawyer, perhaps, would find this difficult ; but we are not examining his legal claims ; and, even where " observation and experiment " would have been quite easy, we find him making statements that would have seemed ludicrous to Leonardo and thousands of other great predecessors. He says, for instance, that " wooden arrows without an iron point penetrate further into wooden substance than the

same arrows pointed with iron, owing to the similarity of substance." Was there ever such a blatant example of pontificating bluff? Well may De Maistre affirm that Bacon deceives himself both as to his aims, and as to his means of attaining them.

Again, one of his most distinguished commentators praises him for the welcome he gave to the microscope. Any one who refers to the passage in the "Novum Organum" itself will observe that Bacon expressly dismisses the microscope as useless. He says that it would be a very fine invention *if it could do certain things;* but he takes it for granted that it cannot do these things (all of which it has since done, through the work of other men), and he therefore dismisses it for all practical purposes.

He rejected Harvey's great discovery of the circulation of the blood. To inquire into the functions of the body was erroneous, for his "new method" would have nothing to do with "final causes." He eliminated the teleological aspect of the universe entirely, and therefore forbade the most fruitful form of inquiry that practical science has ever used—from Aristotle to Darwin—the simple question, "What is this for?" "What purpose does this serve?" Such questions do

not belong merely to the specialized sphere of theology.

Macaulay dismisses Plato and the greatest of the Greeks as entirely fruitless. But Bacon's theories had no advantage over those of the medical school of Cos. His marvellous assertions that " the heart of an ape applied to the neck or head helpeth the wit, and is good for the falling sickness " ; and that " there be divers sorts of bracelets fit to comfort the spirits, and they be of three intentions, refrigerant, corroborant, and aperient," can hardly be defended on the ground that they were " vulgar errors " of his time. Nobody doubts that. The tone is simply that of the intellectual humbug. Bacon was not proud of his Natural History ; for he thought it the duty of the hodmen of science to collect " facts," while he played the intellectual Alexander. He was quite explicit about this. With amazing disingenuousness learned professors have tried to keep their hocus-pocus up by pretending that Bacon's lack of pride in the work meant that he disbelieved in it. His description of the way in which his own warts were healed purports to be a piece of first-hand observation. The warts were rubbed with fat. The fat was then nailed up in the open air and the warts diminished in pro-

portion as the fat wasted away. It is simply a demonstration of the second-rate quality of his mind, in the age of Harvey.

Macaulay's portrait of him is as monstrous as the impossible picture drawn by Pope of "the wisest, brightest, meanest, of mankind." The elements are mixed in every man; but they are not completely contradictory or the man would cease to exist. Macaulay depicts Bacon as an utterly black Devil, who is also a perfectly good God. He does, in sober earnest, compare him with the Eternal. "The beneficence of his philosophy resembled the beneficence of the common Father." Was there ever, even in Macaulay, such an appallingly disproportioned remark? But the great law-giver had also to be depicted as a torturer, taking down the evidence and listening to the shrieks of an old man upon the rack. It gives a sinister significance to Bacon's curiously mediæval remark that when Nature is placed on the rack all her secrets may be extorted. If philosophies are to be judged by their "fruits," these cannot possibly be limited to material fruits, even when the material fruits can really be attributed to the philosopher, as they cannot be attributed to Lord Bacon. Socrates, drinking the hemlock, with his eyes

fixed upon his vision of eternal goodness, eternal beauty, and eternal truth, bequeathed to the world a spiritual heritage of inestimable value. There is nothing in the ascending process of Bacon's logic that can be compared for precision of method and result with that sublime ascent of the mind of Plato from form to form until it arrived at the unity of a " Beauty, wonderful in its nature."

The aims of Plato and the aims of applied science are not mutually exclusive, as Macaulay appeared to think. Bacon himself did not think so. He likens knowledge to a pyramid of which the basis is natural history ; the second stage " physic " ; and the stage next the vertical point " metaphysic." The peak he regards as unattainable, but the three stages climb to it like the three acclamations " *Sancte, sancte, sancte.*" This is the ascent of Plato translated into the atmosphere of scholasticism, with the final ecstasy expressed through a chant of the Church. It is a dim vision of the truth from a great distance. But it is in such passages that the literary merits of Bacon are to be found. It is on literary merits of the less imaginative kind that his spurious reputation as a philosopher has been founded, largely by the casual references of men of letters,

for whom he is a useful figurehead. These references (see any index to Emerson's works, for instance), seldom go further than his name, or the name of a book, and never indicate what he actually achieved. He is often eloquent, but, as the greatest English man of science of his time remarked, it is nearly always the eloquence of a man " philosophising like a Lord Chancellor."

Just as to-day a book by a politician may command an audience that it would never have gained by its intrinsic merit, the philosophical reputation of Bacon was inflated by his Lord Chancellorship ; and his spurious philosophical reputation, by a vicious circle, has led to exaggeration of his literary merits. The " Novum Organum," in its unfinished and fragmentary condition, is hardly more than a collection of detached apophthegms. Some of his worshippers appear to think it can be compared with the " Principia " of Newton. It cannot, for a single moment, be compared even with the casual notebook of the artist, Leonardo, at a much earlier date. Occasionally, in his essays, Bacon quotes a really wise detached observation, as in his remark that a little philosophy leads to atheism, but much philosophy to religion. Yet always it is an observation *about* profound thoughts rather than a revelation of

profundity in himself. When, instead of orating about the glories of thought, he attempts to think philosophically on his own account, he fails disastrously. His doctrine of " forms " is vitiated through and through by the fact that he uses the word " form " in a dozen different senses. If his treatment of his " forms " be compared with Plato's treatment of his " ideas," the difference between a third-rate and a first-rate mind is at once evident.

He desires to impose himself on the world as its greatest philosopher, without any real originality of his own. It was the " Utopia " of More that cast the little shadow of the " New Atlantis " ; and almost any two pages of the notebook of Leonardo contain more fruitful ideas. If it be true that the Royal Society was born of that slight fable, one can only say that, in this case, a very small mouse brought forth a mountain. It is Polonius, not Shakespeare, that speaks in those crafty world-wise essays. " Neither a borrower nor a lender be "—the very tone is there ; and one thinks that Shakespeare must have gone to life for some of the details in his portrait of a statesman. It is the wooer of the rich widow of Hatton who speaks in the essay on Love. Historians have defended his acceptance of bribes on

the ground that, after all, he would betray the briber, and probably take a bribe from the other side as well. He had learned enough from Macchiavelli to subdue all his affections to his personal advantage. He was able to superintend the execution of his best friend, and to send Raleigh to the scaffold. It is not necessary for historians to accuse the Cecils of jealousy because Burghley so steadfastly refused to promote the young Bacon. It was at least possible that they distrusted his character. He employed Hobbes as his secretary. The author of the "Leviathan," afterwards, when he was writing on logic, never once mentioned the "new instrument" which had enabled his former employer to reject the greatest scientific discoveries of his age. For Hobbes knew well what the best minds in Italy, as well as England, knew.

But it is the eye that gives the finishing touch to the portrait. Harvey, a real scientific discoverer, and an acute observer, had brought his own greatest discovery, to be ignominiously dismissed by the jealous Father of Modern Science. He saw Lord Bacon; and he left us his record in a single biting sentence, "*He had an eye like a viper.*"

AN APRIL DAY

No secular festival is more worthy of observance by the English-speaking world than the birthday of Shakespeare. There is nothing uncertain now about the glory of that April day. But it moves us to a deeper sense of the beauty and mystery of human life when we consider how obscure and insignificant at the time were all the circumstances of an event that is commemorated to-day among nations that were then unborn, and in continents that were then undiscovered. It was a matter for an idle word or two at a few cottage-doors when that child was born, that son was given, to an obscure man and woman, in the quiet English countryside. They rejoiced in him with the old wonder and tenderness; they bent above his weakness with the old compassion. But their happiness was their own affair. It concerned the outside world as little as the cry of the thrush to his mate in the tree outside their narrow window. To them, of course, he was a marvellous child, but only as all children are marvellous to their own. They could have no intimation that on

that English April day there had entered into the world the supreme glory of the human intellect. There was no carol to herald his birth, except that of the skylark, innocently singing at heaven's gate, over the green English hills ; but the most beautiful of all the old English carols might well have been sung for him, for it was inspired by his own season :

" He came all so still
Where his mother was
As dew in Aprille
That falleth on the grass

He came all so still
Where his mother lay
As dew in Aprille
That falleth on the spray."

His own life in its external details was so obscure that it escaped the historian ; yet there is no man of whose real inner life we know so much. If it still remains, for the greater part, uncharted, it is only because it is so vast. We know how he loved the land that bred him, adored her earth, listened to her birds, delighted in her flowers, so that when he names them hereafter they are not merely names, but living creatures of the sun and air, like his daffodils.

" That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty."

At the end of his London career it was surely these things that called him back to the country-side. Prosaic commentators have wondered at his choice of so humdrum a retirement from the excitements of the theatre ; and they have supposed that he must have had a streak of what they sorrowfully call " bourgeois respectability." That is the way of those vicarious Bohemians who —hideously respectable themselves—talk about life, but have never lived ; and babble about books, but have never created a song out of the pulse of their own life-blood.

The alleged cause of his death ought, at any rate, to satisfy these gay dogs of commentators. But, as for the motive that took him there, may we not suppose that even at the height of his success in London, his own music, music that haunts us after three centuries like a living voice, was always murmuring in his ear,—

" I know a bank where the wild thyme blows " ?

He was no mere provincial. His adage about home-keeping youth and his derision of those who thought that there were no " livers out of England " show that he knew as well as Coriolanus that there were worlds elsewhere. But it was from English earth that he drew his strength

and learned that deep mellow laughter, " broad as ten thousand beeves at pasture." It was in English colours that he dipt his giant brush and painted that great humorous picture of the human countenance—" O, you shall see him laugh, *until his face be like a wet cloak ill-laid up!*" How the wrinkles and the gleaming moisture leap to light as under the hand of a Rembrandt! Or that other picture of " a flea on Bardolph's nose, like a black soul burning in hell fire."

English, too, was that deep instinct for order and proportion which is one of the chief factors in his greatness. This again is a puzzle to those who have never learned the truth that Coleridge stated once for all in English criticism that the highest genius and mere lawlessness have nothing in common, and that genius, indeed, is essentially the power to lay hold upon the laws of the universe, inner and outer, to enter into harmony with them, and to achieve its freedom through that harmony.

" In la sua voluntade e nostra pace."

It was genius that said that, and genius that discerned in law " the love that moves the sun and the other stars." Plato knew that " concord of harmony." St. Augustine knew it; and

Shakespeare, in "Troilus and Cressida," points the result of its loss in men, in nations, and out in the cosmos.

"Take but degree away, untune that string
And hark what discord follows . . .
Force should be right ; or rather right and wrong
Should lose their names and so should justice, too.
Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite :
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power
Must make perforce an universal prey
And last eat up himself."

His "order" was not the trim order of the artificial garden that some of his eighteenth-century critics would have preferred ; but the profounder order of Nature herself, to whom he was so faithful that she rewarded him by taking him to her heart and merging his music into the universal harmonies ; so that in certain great moments it seems that the universal Spirit is speaking through his lips. By the power of that music, in such moments, his words assume the inevitability of a natural law. They move into accord with a more majestic rhythm ; and we hear the sound of mightier tides. His plays are often misunderstood by the modern theatrical critics because they have seldom understood the music which is the vital and essential part of his poetry.

" Such harmony is in immortal souls
But while this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close us in we cannot hear it."

It is by virtue of this music that the works of Shakespeare live ; and that again and again his lines seem to wring the last drops of ecstasy or agony from the heart ; lines like that of Antony :

" Of many thousand kisses the poor last."

Or the dying cry of Hamlet to his friend :

" Absent thee from felicity awhile."

It is in the strength of this music that he wrestles, as Hamlet himself wrestled, for truth in a world of false appearances ; and that he stretches out his hand with Lear to feel and make sure, in a world of shams, that the tears upon the face of Cordelia are at least real tears. It is in the power of this music that he dissolves the material universe :

" These cloud-capped towers, these gorgeous palaces,
These solemn temples, the great globe itself
Yea, all which it inherit shall dissolve
And like this unsubstantial pageant faded
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

And in the power of the same music he could affirm the abiding reality, behind all changes.

" Love is not love
That alters when it alteration finds
Or bends with the remover to remove,
Oh, no, it is an ever-fixèd mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.
It is the star to every wandering barque,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come.
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved ;
I never writ nor no man ever loved."

It was in the power of this music that, at times, he seems to climb out of this world of time and space into the eternal world ; to say by sheer force of genius what the philosophers have been vainly endeavouring to say for ages ; and to tread the whole material universe under his feet, while he aspires to the Light of Light :

" Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store ;
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross.
Within be fed, without be rich no more.
So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on men ;
And Death once dead, there's no more dying then."

It is this music that gives to the works of Shakespeare an inexhaustible truth, growing with the centuries as our own knowledge of the universe

grows ; and it is by virtue of this music that he stands in the flux of things as a builder and a maker. He stands for law against confusion, for good against evil ; and for cosmos against chaos as no other man has ever stood. Like all truly great things, his works are a vital growth, rooted in reality.

There is something profoundly moving in the fact that this man who, as time goes on, is seen towering above all others as the supreme head of the intellectual world, was cast for so obscure a part in his own generation, a part that all the great figures of his own day would have despised. The Power that controlled his destiny allowed him no superficial vanities. He must go here and there and, as he said, in his own momentary bitterness, make himself a motley to the view. If it be true that at the beginning he was forced to earn a few pence by holding horses outside the theatre, it is perhaps only another illustration of the fact that when Apollo comes to the Kingdom of Admetus, he comes in disguise, and he goes to the hut rather than to the palace. But what a drama is there, if we could rightly picture that shadowy figure standing in that dark little street, and consider that he was, in actual fact, the king of England's kings and that, burning unseen,

within him, there was a splendour that was worth more to England than all her other possessions.

Three hundred years later, in the summer of 1914, in that strangely distant world before the war (and only a few weeks before the shattering of that world) there was a meeting in London to discuss the best means of celebrating the tercentenary of Shakespeare, which was to fall due in 1916. It was to be a world-wide celebration, and the ambassadors of many nations were there ; among them the ambassador of a great nation that Shakespeare never knew, though he belongs to it and it speaks his tongue, the United States of America. Few of those present had any reason to suppose that anything was going wrong behind the scenes. The Archbishop of Canterbury made a very happy speech, and, as he commented on the Bowdlerised Shakespeare that the youthful Swinburne took with him to Eton, Mr. Balfour looked quickly up at him and smiled. Mr. A. E. W. Mason expressed the hope that out of the international celebration of Shakespeare's birthday a new friendship might be engendered among the nations and a new hope for the world's peace. There was a curious momentary silence—when it was announced that the ambassador for Germany, a country where Shakespeare has been

honoured in some respects more generally than in his own, was not able to be present. It was probably only an accident; but, if so, it was one of those accidents which are, unconsciously dramatic, a touch of the Master-dramatist.

The celebration of that tercentenary was taken out of our hands. In 1916, instead of England speaking for Shakespeare, the greatest ambassador that this country has ever known began to speak for England. All over that continent of the New World, in the universities of forty-eight States, and in great cities of which the majority of Europeans have no conception, cities as far apart as London from Petrograd, thousands and hundreds of thousands of men and women gathered together in memory of the shadowy figure who once stood in that dark London street. I saw one such gathering of more than eight thousand people—a sea of faces, listening, tense and still, not to the praise of Shakespeare, but to Shakespeare's praise of England.

"This precious stone set in the silver sea
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England."

All through the New World, on that three hundredth anniversary, men and women were rising to their feet in silent homage to something greater

than any national symbol. Chiefly through him the literature of England had been invested with more than the splendour of Greece or Rome. What can be said of such a power? What tribute can we pay to it? Surely nothing less than the resolve—so far as in us lies—that we will treasure, uphold and develop the tradition he has bequeathed to us.

To that obscure shadow in the dark London street; "a jackdaw," as one of his contemporaries called him, "tricked out with borrowed feathers"; a barbarian, as Voltaire thought; a man of small Latin and less Greek; displaying as many crudities as Nature herself, and as many depths and heights; our modern world, with all its knowledge and subtle scholarship, poring upon him, line by line, word by word, syllable by syllable, has at last only one thing to say; and it says it in the voice of poetry:

> "Others abide our question. Thou art free.
> We ask and ask. Thou smilest and art still,
> Out-topping knowledge—."

WALT WHITMAN AND AMERICAN INDIVIDUALISM

THE most pernicious "Idol of the Tribe"—as Bacon would have called it—that ever fooled the human mind in international affairs is the pseudo-philosophical analogy that has been drawn between the State and the living organism of the individual being. It is all the more pernicious because, up to a certain point, it contains a certain truth. Poets and fabulists, from Æsop to Shakespeare, have not failed to drive this home.

"The senators of Rome are this good belly
And you the mutinous members. . . . What do you think,
You the great toe of this assembly? . . .
For that being one of the lowest, basest, poorest,
Of this most wise rebellion, thou go'st foremost" . . .

It is obvious enough to what ends and on how many sides imagery of this kind may be employed. Here and there it may be suggestive and stimulating to thought; but it must not be mistaken for anything more than a loose analogy. When it is treated after the style of Herbert Spencer, as though it gave us a scientific clue or chart to all

our social and political problems, and as though, when we were puzzled, all that we had to do was to consult the pattern of the human body, then this imagery becomes a real danger to clear thinking. For, in the first place, the State is a far looser and less highly developed affair than the individuals composing it, which is the exact opposite of the relation of the human body to its members or its cells. Even more misleading is the popular form of the fallacy—the universal habit of personifying nations as though each of them, according to our mood, were a single agreeable or disagreeable man or woman, so that France is a Mænad or an Angel of Liberty, England a John Bull or a hypocrite, and the United States an Uncle Sam or a nigger-driving extortioner. How early the mind is warped in these matters is shown by the experiment which was tried recently on groups of American schoolchildren. The names of various nationalities were read out in quick succession, and the children were asked to write down, immediately after hearing each name, the first impression it conveyed to them. In the great majority of cases these impressions showed that the name of any nationality other than that of the children themselves had conjured up an object of contempt.

"Italian," for instance, conveyed not the glory of Leonardo, or Dante, or Michael Angelo, but a mean little man, selling bananas or accompanied by a monkey in red breeches.

There is no harm in John Bull, with his side-whiskers and top-boots, or in Uncle Sam, with his long tails and his goatee beard. Not even for their sins would we send those elderly elves back to their insubstantial fairyland. But it is a curious fact that each country, in the popular journals, is represented by a rustic type that is not to be found in either to-day. Once, in a remote part of the Middle West, I did see a lean old farmer with a goatee beard, who looked like a distant relation of the traditional Uncle Sam. But he was almost as incongruous with the crowd of ordinary Americans around him as a zebra at the starting-post of the Derby. As for John Bull, he is certainly not to be found in the British Army or Navy. He is not in the least like Nelson, or Lord Balfour, or Gladstone, or Disraeli, or Shelley, or Keats, or the Duke of Wellington, or Admiral Beatty, or Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. If he were to walk through the City of London to-day, he would look as incongruous as Henry the Eighth at a jazz dance. This in itself is a trivial matter; but it illustrates a fact that is of very great

importance. In both countries we are continually talking of the typical Englishman and the typical American ; and while, within certain very wide limits, each may know its own, there is a tendency among Englishmen to restrict the " typical American " to a kind that exists only in fiction. Englishmen seldom appear to such disadvantage, or miss the mark so widely, as when they try amongst themselves to caricature the speech of what they believe to be the " typical American." There is only one human being whose humour falls equally flat for any one who knows both sides ; and that is the American trying to caricature or imitate what he believes to be the " typical Englishman." There is something in the subject-matter which does not suit the style of wit in either. Accent, manner, character, everything is always absolutely wrong ; and it is usually as painful to listen to such sparkling wags as to watch a preacher who has lost the third of his sermon, or some one at a public dinner who is telling the chestnut of the centuries, and has mislaid the better part even of that. It is not a personal prejudice which makes the American brilliancies of this kind seem even less successful than the English, but the fact that Americans sometimes entertain their English guests, on more

or less public occasions, with specimens of this somewhat rudimentary art. On one occasion, immediately before an Englishman was to speak, a somewhat obese gentleman delivered a facetious address, which one gathered was a parody of what is called "the English accent." (The unconscious humour of this phrase never seems to dawn on its users, though they would probably realise that France and Germany may fairly claim to possess the frontier line of their own speech.) The obese gentleman at the dinner spoke in the broadest accent not of America, but of his own particular part of America. His favourite witticism was to pronounce "rather"—"rawther"; but, as the supposed English affectation came through his nose, it sounded sadly unlike anything ever heard in our little island. This continued for nearly twenty minutes, with occasional pauses in which he ejaculated "Qu-a-i-te" and "As it wur-ah," apparently to the intense hilarity of his audience. Englishmen are often supposed by Americans to be entirely lacking in humour. Those present on this occasion were not less amused than the rest, but they were amused at something quite different; and when one of them eventually spoke, with an entirely different manner and accent from that

of the humourist, it was even more amusing to observe the disconcerted expression of the latter, all the more crestfallen because his fellow-countrymen, towards the end of his turn, had begun to suspect that something was wrong and were murmuring, "Joe is getting out of his depth."

The Englishman's "typical American" is equally wide of the mark. Had Roosevelt, for instance, anything in common with that mythical figure? And what had he in common with Wilson, or Mr. Rockefeller, or Nathaniel Hawthorne, or Edgar Allan Poe, or Mr. Chauncey Depew, or the Bishop of New York, or Professor Fairfield Osborne, or Hale, the astronomer? It is no answer to say that these are exceptional men. They are the men that, in one way or another, represent America. English conservative journals often insist that Walt Whitman, with his "I see three lusty angels in red shirts bagged at the waist," and what he himself called his "barbaric yawp," is the typical American, and the true representative of her literature. But what has he in common with any of the highly civilised men of intellect and affairs who are mentioned above, or with the hundreds of thousands of students in the forty-eight State universities and other

educational institutions of America, or with the sleek (and, as I am credibly informed, "slick") business men who annually cross the Atlantic? There are even more widely varying types among the obscurer millions, for there is a certain common ground on which all those others meet; but there is very little in common between the Yankee farm-hand, a worker on the films at Hollywood, the "beach-guard" at San Diego, a Pullman "conductor" on the Texas flyer, and the leader of a Revivalist choir in Ohio.

It is time that in international affairs we had an entirely new orientation of the mind. We must be rid of these pre-Copernican centres of personification—these facile simplifications of the infinitely complex human problem. The imagination has now been developed to a point when it can visualise the individual realities, even in their boundless variety, from which those misleading abstractions are drawn. When the newspapers tell us, for instance, that this or that nation is behaving like a single gigantic forger or murderer in whom all individual differences are swallowed up, the imagination must come to our rescue and tell us the more complex truth, which is probably something like this: that a certain fact has been accomplished by a particular group of men; that

at least half the nation is bitterly opposed to it ; that half of the rest are indifferent or misled ; that even in the responsible group real opinions are secretly divided ; and, most important of all, that the unspoiled youth of the nation, though helpless, is scornful of the whole proceeding. It is hardly too much to say that a special realisation of all that is implied in this would have prevented many wars, and would immensely simplify the task of those who are trying to prevent wars in future. If the machinery of the League of Nations, or any other machinery, could be adopted to give free expression to the kind of opinion which, while perfectly honourable, is nevertheless muzzled or silenced on the eve of war, there would, even in the event of war, be infinitely less tragedy and infinitely more hope of a reasonable termination. It is not reasonable that, as various memoirs of the Great War actually helped to show, the destinies of millions of individuals should be decided for life or death by one or two men in private, each of whom is ready to confess that he was largely in the dark himself and yet was unwilling that any one should know what they knew outside a very small group of politicians (who did not even represent the real intellect of the country in

question, but only, for the most part, its smart "careerists").

Nothing could be more wholly damnable than the cynicism with which great nations were kept in complete ignorance during the World-War of facts that most terribly concerned every individual in those nations. Civilisation has at least outgrown the stage when the spectacle of thinking men and women being herded and marshalled like sheep, in complete ignorance of everything that is happening in "high quarters," can be tolerated. It is the individual, in all his numbers and varieties, that must be the concern of the future. The State was made for the individual, even more certainly than the Sabbath was made for him; and neither the socialistic nor the autocratic plan of merging all individuals into a grey uniformity can succeed. Walt Whitman, barbaric as his genius was in many respects, has this great message for his own country and the rest of the world. He insists upon the unique importance of each individual human soul. In fact, satirists have gone so far as to say that he was the poet of a country where every one is a little better than every one else. But, paradox as this may seem, it is not only justifiable as a theory, it is true in fact. If there be any meaning in

human life at all and any foundation for religion, it is to be found in the value of the individual to himself, to the world and to his Creator, as " a single separate person," possessing a unique quality, so that in the universal symphony his own personal note is as necessary as any other, and for its own particular purpose is even a little better than any other. This is really the essence of everything that Walt Whitman had to say ; and it is the secret of his appeal as a poet. It is the explanation of his long catalogues of the various kinds of humanity in the United States. He touches them with a kind of glory because, although they are artistically unrelated, they were related in his idea of " these States," of humanity and the Godhead, as essential units, units whose place can never exactly be filled in the universal scheme by any other. He gives the direct lie to the apparently modest, but really infinitely conceited refinement of those who boast about their own " reserve " or deliberately inform others that this " reserve " is the mark of a chosen people. It is only recently that the English have begun to talk about their silence, and it is not a good sign. The frank expression of pride in a country which is greater than yourself is sometimes infinitely less vain (as Shakespeare knew) than the self-

consciousness, complicated by a hundred egotistical inhibitions, which ends in such modesty of the leading article as " We are the most modest nation on earth. We never speak of our virtues. This is the mark of the breed." There is a glimmer of the true light in such a spirit ; but it has only pushed its problem one stage back. The price of such superiority is not partial, but complete silence ; the only alternative is the recovery of a healthy objectivity in which the separate personality, for all its importance, is not confused with what is greater than itself and need not blush for its honest admirations. Walt Whitman may seem to boast, especially when he is talking of himself ; but there is more than one kind of boasting ; and there is one very deadly and subtle kind. The man who boasts that he never boasts, and hints that this conceals a nature infinitely superior to Shakespeare's Henry V. ; the poet who implies or openly tells us that his personal patriotism is of so exalted a kind that he can only speak of his emotions as one speaks of the attributes of God, in a hushed atmosphere of negatives and abstentions, or by mockery of the humbler crowd—such a man may be vastly more conceited, vastly more of a pharisee than the child waving a flag. By all means let us have the

sacred silence. But, in that case, let it be silence, and complete silence. Do not let us boast about it in poetry (which happens above all things to be a way of expressing an emotion). Even when Walt Whitman seems to be boasting of his own importance in the scheme of things he claims no more for himself than he claims for others ; and the whole question resolves itself into that of attaining a harmonious adjustment of the various claims, in the musical hierarchy of the universe.

While any place can be filled in one sense, it still remains true that the individual strikes his own note in the universal scheme, and that this remains itself for ever, and retains its own quality. Number Thirteen may replace Number Twelve in a world of convicts, but in a world of souls Number Twelve keeps his own number to all eternity. In his philosophy of numbers, Pythagoras might have illustrated the necessity of the recurrence (or resurrection) of all numbers as individuals in the eternal memory :

" One of the Great Nation, the nation of many nations,
A Southerner soon as a Northerner, a planter, nonchalant and hospitable, down by the Oconec I live.
A Yankee, loving my own way, ready for trade, my joints the limberest joints on earth, and the stoutest joints on earth ;

A Kentuckian, walking the vale of the Elkhorn, in my deer-skin leggings ;
A boatman over lakes or bays, or along coasts, a Hoosier, Badger, Buck-eye ;
A prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician, priest,
I resist anything better than my own diversity ;
I breathe the air, but leave plenty after me,
And am not stuck up, and am in my place."

THE UNRECOGNISED AIR

THERE is one great influence in European literature, even in modern European literature, which is as vital and all-permeating as that of the air on the creatures that breathe it. Even where the makers of that literature are unconscious of it, or even unwilling to recognise it, they are dependent upon it for the very colour of the corpuscles in their veins.

It need hardly be said that the word " modern " is used here in its proper sense to mark the latest of the three great divisions of history (the other two being the ancient and the mediæval) and not, as it is so commonly used in the Press to-day, to signify merely the conventions of the last publishing season. If we include Dante as the supreme figure of mediæval literature, the singer in whom, at once, the Middle Ages culminated and the modern period began ; and if we survey those works of literature, from his day to our own, which seem to possess qualities of permanent value ; it is impossible to dissociate them from certain elements that have been contributed to human

thought and emotion by the Christian religion, even though these elements may be seized and transmuted as the oxygen of the atmosphere is transmuted by those who breathe it. It is not carrying the analogy too far to say that in many cases the distinctly anti-Christian literature in many respects corresponds only to what is breathed out again after the breather has extracted —consciously or unconsciously—what he needed for his own life ; and that Voltaire himself was able to breathe out a destructive atmosphere only because he had unconsciously drawn in, and made use of, its more vital constituents. For the influence of Christianity is not limited to those who acknowledge it, or are aware of it.

> " If the Red Slayer thinks he slays,
> Or if the slain thinks he is slain,
> They know not well the subtle ways
> I keep and pass and turn again."

And so, to strike at once the very centre of the enemy's shield, it may be pointed out that Voltaire (who may be regarded as the typical anti-Christian of modern world literature) has only one weapon of attack that still retains its weight and can still be respected in the higher regions of the intellect to-day. This is his contention that the God of the theologians is lacking in the higher

attributes of his own "Supreme Being." In other words, it was impossible for Voltaire to think as the pagan Lucretius. Confronted by the Lisbon earthquake, he could feel none of the pagan satisfaction of the man who from a secure shore watches the death-agonies of another; and the higher attributes which he insists are necessary to his own Supreme Being are precisely those upon which the spirit of Christianity, transcending all the theologies, had taught him to insist :—

* * *

"Ignorer ton être suprême,
Grand Dieu ! c'est un moindre blasphème,
Et moins digne de ton courroux
Que de te croire impitoyable,
De nos malheurs insatiable,
Jaloux, injuste comme nous."

So he wrote in his "Ode sur le Fanatisme"; what is this but an insistence on the very attributes of the Deity which it has been the glory and the power of the Christian religion to find in its own Founder, and to give as the central explanation of its own mystery, "God so loved the world." Creeds and systems, theologies and theologians may have failed again and again and to the uttermost; but nothing can alter the fact that the strength of Christianity, the wisdom that was hidden from the wise and revealed to the simplicity

and love of little children, the infinite justice at one with infinite mercy and divine compassion had so wrought upon the minds of men that Voltaire himself was intellectually compelled to judge its priests by the standards which they had forgotten. Nor is this conclusion affected in the least by Voltaire's own blindness and thrice-proven intellectual dishonesty, as when in his haste to condemn what he thought might be one of the evidences of the Old Testament legend of the Flood he attacked the real discoveries of the early geologists, and in the very irony of which he was so proud became himself a lasting subject for the irony of history.

This incorporation of the elements of Christianity in the works of writers who are professedly anti-Christian is one of the most striking characteristics revealed by a careful analysis of modern literature. It occurs in poets like Shelley and Swinburne, the first of whom attacked the lifeless creeds of his own day, and described himself as an "atheist" only to make one of the most burning confessions of faith that have ever been made in poetry; faith, not in any sectarian system, but in

"That Light whose smile kindles the universe
That Beauty in which all things work and move."

Shelley's vision of that Light and world-sustain-

ing Love is at one with the vision of St. John ; and the music in which it is expressed is a continuation of the music of Dante, in the opening and close of the " Paradiso " :—

" La gloria di colui che tutto move
Per l'universo penetra, e risplende
In una parte più, e meno altrove."

and

" L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle."

In the later poet, Swinburne, there are even more striking illustrations of the debt of anti-Christian writers to Christianity, both in thought and feeling. Tennyson, while praising the splendour and strength of one of Swinburne's early works once asked him the significant question whether it was *fair* to abuse the Deity in the language and imagery of the Hebrew prophets. But Swinburne goes farther than this. In " Songs before Sunrise " he expresses his own highest thoughts and emotions in the language of the Bible ; and, in poems like " Quia Multum Amavit," the validity of those thoughts and emotions depends upon the validity of the figures and the imagery that he is using. His poem " Before a Crucifix," for instance, in the fury of its attack on the Christianity of the churches, seemed to many of the orthodox to be merely a piece of fanatical

blasphemy. But its real content is something more than this ; and, when he is confronted by the realities of suffering, and grief in the world around him, it is not to the Greek vision of Aphrodite or any pagan imagery that he turns, to express his highest thoughts about it. Step by dark step, this so-called anti-Christian is blindly led on, as a musician is led on by a surrounding orchestra, to postulate the very principles which he was supposed, possibly even by himself, to be denying.

> " O sacred head, O desecrate,
> O labour-wounded feet and hands,
> O blood poured forth in pledge to fate
> Of nameless lives in divers lands,
> O slain and spent and sacrificed
> People, the grey-grown speechless Christ."

Though he is turning the imagery to a new purpose, its validity here depends upon the truth of the central idea of Christianity, the God who became man, and the ultimate object of the poet's worship is indistinguishable from that of the saints of the Middle Ages.

> " And the blood blots his holy hair
> And white brows over hungering eyes
> That plead against us, . . ."

There is indeed a sense in which some of the

greatest of the anti-Christian writers may be said to be fulfilling rather than destroying the law which they seemed to others (and sometimes to themselves) to be attacking. Their spirit, though weakened by perversities or warped by intellectual pride, or reacting against its own environment in a way that has no meaning for others, has often, burning at its core, the anger of Christ in the Temple against those who have made it into a den of thieves. The really valuable part of the modern literature of "rebellion," whether it be in a Christian like Tolstoi or in professedly anti-Christian writers, has this, and this alone, as the foundation of whatever greatness it possesses. At the same time it must be remembered that seeing the motes in the eyes of others, and seeing them with anger, is an occupation that, in literature, as in life, may obscure many other matters of importance; and the literature of "rebellion" and destructive thought, as such, has never risen to the heights of the great creative world-poets. The two great epics that literature can oppose to those of antiquity during the last nineteen hundred years are both attempts to unfold the system of the universe, and in both cases the intellectual groundwork and the spiritual vision that gives them their permanent value were the

direct result of the Christian religion. The world-ranging mind of Dante could never have achieved the great musical consummation of thought in the line

" E la sua volontade e nostra pace,"

if the seed had not been sown in his mind by the earlier simplicity of the prayer " Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It was the Bible that enabled Milton to rise to the height of his great argument in " Paradise Lost "—a poem compared with which even the music of Homer seemed to Landor like that of a tinkling cymbal on the shores of the ocean—and it is never to be forgotten that the values of that music are not to be sought or discovered merely in the story he tells, or in what the logician can extract from the surface-meaning of the words. Attempts to interpret the Bible allegorically have been regarded with a just suspicion, for they have sometimes been mere evasions of questions that deserve a direct answer, and they have been pressed into the service of intellectual dishonesty. But Milton affirmed directly that his own art is a " process of speech " without which it would be impossible to tell of the acts of God. His meaning is to be sought in the symbolical values of great art and great poetry—

as we seek it in the works of the great painters, or in a symphony of Beethoven. The very movement of the words has a meaning that transcends their literal meaning as far as a great cathedral transcends that of the separate stones of which it is built.

> " Hail, holy Light, off-spring of heaven first-born
> Or of the Eternal, co-eternal beam
> May I express thee unblamed, since God is light
> And never but in unapproached light
> Dwelt from Eternity, dwelt then in thee . . ."

Such passages as these in the great blind poet are transfigured by the spirit of holiness that he invoked. They are the mountain-peaks of the world's literature, making the heaven of heavens their dwelling-place.

II

But the influence of Christianity upon literature is not limited to those writers who have either opposed it or, as in the two supreme masters of epic during the last nineteen hundred years, drawn their inspiration directly from its fountain-head. It is impossible here to cover the whole field, but one may indicate briefly that the literature of mediæval chivalry, in ballad and romance, as well as in the statelier poems of the Crusades by

Ariosto and Tasso, derived its nobility and beauty from ideas that had been sown and fostered by Christianity. The new compassion for the weak, the new reverence for womanhood, the truth and honour of Chaucer's "perfect gentle knight"; and, everywhere, those gleams of the beauty of holiness, even though it were praised as a remote star in a heaven beyond the reach of our sin-stained earth; all these things were derived from the religion of which the wandering knight in the greatest of all the poems of chivalry—Spenser's "Faerie Queene"—bore the emblem upon his shield:

> "And on his breast a bloody cross he bore
> The dear remembrance of his dying Lord."

But in the wider fields of later literature, where the cross was no longer worn upon the breast, the influence is no less potent. The Elizabethan drama, dealing with all sorts and conditions of men and women, may be traced back by the curious to its origin in the old morality plays; but the debt is a wider and a deeper one than that. Hazlitt has pointed out how much the Elizabethan drama owes to a religion which had taught us the love of good for the sake of good, and, answering the question, "Who is our neighbour?" by the words "one whose wounds we can bind

up," has done more to humanise the thoughts and tame the unruly passions than all who have tried to reform or benefit mankind. The very idea of the desire to do good, of regarding the human race as one family, is hardly to be found in any other code. The Greeks and Romans never thought of considering others. . . . But in the Christian religion the heart of a nation becomes malleable, capable of pity, of forgiveness, of relaxing in its claims and remitting its power. And so, in Shakespeare, though his works are dramatic and can give no direct expression of his own personal creed, we can trace everywhere the prints of

> " those blessed feet
> Which fifteen hundred years ago were nailed
> For our redemption on the bitter cross."

We trace it in his deep sense of the moral law, and still more in his humanity, which echoes the Sermon on the Mount, and adds a second benediction to it.

> " The quality of mercy is not strained.
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed.
> It blesseth him who gives and him who takes."

Just as Dante owed one of his most consummate passages of intellectual music to a sentence in the Lord's Prayer, so Shakespeare owes this passage to

the spirit that breathed upon a tortured world the divine sentence, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." To say that there is much in Shakespeare (as in Dante also) that conflicts with the teaching of Christ is merely to say that he was human, and that only a God could reveal the perfect harmony. The fact remains that the poetry of Shakespeare has a capacity of thought and emotion, a breadth of charity and humanity that were not possible to Greece and Rome. He owes these characteristics to the Christian religion and to that figure of whom another Elizabethan dramatist—Decker—wrote

> "The best of men
> That e'er wore earth about him was a sufferer ;
> A soft, meek, patient, humble tranquil spirit ;
> The first true gentleman that ever breathed."

These influences are so widely and so subtly spread that it is impossible to examine them in detail. It is only possible to say that they have coloured the whole fabric of European thought, even where it is least conscious of the fact, and even where it has apparently discarded the last shadow of a religious creed. But in later poets, like Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning in England ; Victor Hugo in France ; and Goethe in Germany, the debt is far clearer than in the

Elizabethan period. It is not that these poets all definitely profess a Christian creed (Goethe certainly did not, even though in "Faust" he uses the Catholic symbolism), but their highest thought and emotion are of an order that belongs as definitely to Christendom, and to Christendom alone, as the use of light and fire belongs to man alone among the creatures on this planet. When Wordsworth writes :

"One lesson, shepherd, let us two divide,
Taught both by what she shows, and what conceals ;
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels,"

he is only expressing in set terms a spirit that is far more deeply interfused through all the literature of his period. For the subtler spiritual elements which literature derived from the Christian religion, we must turn to the mystics and the idealistic philosophers. But here again it should not be forgotten that it is not merely in the "mystics" or in the devotional poets like Herbert and Crashaw and Christina Rossetti that these elements are to be found. They leaven the whole of the higher literature of modern Europe, and exert a mysterious quickening power, not only upon philosophical critics like Carlyle and Tolstoi but on the "religion of beauty" of the poets of

the romantic revival, with its aspirations into the unseen; and on the "religion of humanity" (with its desire to set the crooked straight), which, even where it was unavowed and unconscious, so strongly characterises the work of the greatest modern novelists. Of these last, in England, the best example is Dickens, who never writes as one making what are called religious professions, and yet perhaps has done more than any other writer in modern times to hasten the kingdom of heaven on earth. The sense of pity, the charity, the human kindness that suffuse the vast world of his creation continue the work of the Master whom he seldom directly invokes. One of these rare occasions when, like a long-suppressed cry, the direct appeal breaks from his lips, is in that marvellous scene—not surpassed by Shakespeare or any other—where a foolish and mean woman, far too commonplace to interest the modern exponents of intellectual pride, is brutally treated by the man to whom she was bearing a child.

"*He answered with an imprecation and a blow.*
No angry cries; no loud reproaches. Even her weeping and her sobs were stifled by her clinging round him. . . .
O woman, God-beloved in old Jerusalem! . . ."

It is the cry of the Master himself over the unremembering City of God.

THE REVOLT AGAINST REASON

Put those two words, freedom and authority, in opposition, and you involve, in a single phrase, the storm-centre of more than half the troubles of mankind, from the comic to the terrible. Censorships, artistic squabbles, prohibitions, domestic tyrannies, the "bright young people," scientific materialism, religious bigotry, communism, Victorianism, Royal Academies, Russian revolutions —there is hardly a phase of life, hardly a department of thought, in which those two words do not touch the storm-centre.

Oddly enough, too, it is nearly always assumed, even by the most conservative, that it is a war between two principles, of which one (authority) belongs to the past and is inevitably being extinguished, while the other (freedom) belongs to the future and is always growing. Tradition, morality, experience, law and institutions of all sorts are commonly supposed by a section of the Press to belong to the effete camp of "authority" in general. We are not a logical people, and we are not given to defining our terms, or we might

discover that the universe itself is a conservative institution, with laws and forms not easily broken, not easily even modified ; and that even the freedom and control obtained by science over the physical world are obtained by discovering and following its laws, not by breaking them. It is at least possible that the true freedom of the spiritual world is obtained in an analogous way, and that we are here for the express purpose of learning how to do it. Moreover, the other method, the ego-centric method, is rapidly demonstrating its own madness in the modern world, and the nature of the " freedom " obtained by it is not satisfactory (even to America, if we may judge by what Americans say about it) in our machine-ridden civilisation. The deadliest tyranny of all, the tyranny of evil, has not lost its grip upon the spirit of man ; and Death has not laid aside the stern authority that sets a limit even to human caprice. The question, in fact, is a little more complicated, a little more profound, than the vast majority of our modern rebels or reactionaries suspect.

M. Jacques Maritain, perhaps the most significant of modern French philosophers, has touched the heart of the problem with his remarkable book " Three Reformers — Luther, Descartes, and

Rousseau." He finds, in these three, the fountain-heads of much that is perplexing the world to-day, and especially of what seems to him a gradual revolt against all authority external to the isolated individual. He observes an increasing claim that the authority in all matters, of conduct as well as thought, of each isolated individual is supreme. Each planet, he thinks, insists that it is the sun ; and—a strange sequel to the Copernican theory—a world that was once theo-centric is now rapidly becoming ego-centric, even while its favourite sneer is at the insignificance of the human soul. In Rousseau he sees the beginnings of the inevitable downward movement, through a vague romanticism, and reliance on the higher instincts of the individual Self, to that discovery of an apparently more vivid reality in the lower instincts, which gets so many "distinguished" critics without a standard into police courts at the present day, and ends in a demonstration of the total absurdity of a position from which even Areopagitica cannot extricate them. Maritain finds that Reason itself, since Reason is not subject to the desires of the ego-centric individual and has permanent laws, partakes of the nature of an external authority, and is therefore inevitably rejected as interfering

with the "rights" of the individual's capricious instincts. He believes that the existence of a Supreme Power, a Power with a purpose, the Creator and Controller of the whole universe has been demonstrated over and over again by Reason; and that the modern world does not even faintly realise, because it has not even taken the trouble to acquaint itself with the vast force of that demonstration as it has been developed, from Plato and Aristotle onwards, through the majestic structure of Christian philosophy, in St. Augustine and Aquinas, with Dante as its supreme poet, down to the present day. He believes that each of his three "Reformers" helped to deprive the modern world of certain great metaphysical and religious truths which had been developed through that profound system of the Church of St. Augustine, and he affirms that privation of those truths normally brings with it, in the civilised state, moral disorder, the ruin of personality, and great national catastrophes. He shows us that real and original personality has nothing in common with modern ego-centric individualism, in which standardised "individuals," resembling one another as closely as peas in a pod, or electrons in an atom, attempt to cut themselves off from their own life-source and from

all " external tradition," yet are more and more completely ruled by the great anonymous powers of the State, of Money, and sensational or momentary Opinion. He shows us " that pleasant liberated beast whose continual and infallible progress delights the universe to-day "—the Freudian cultivating his complexes and sublimating his libido ; the thinker making thoughts, not truth, the aim of his thinking, or preparing an entirely new conception of the world, and a refutation of all others, for the titillation of his vanity at the next philosophical congress. And all of them are confounding a false individuality with real personality. " Personality," in the philosophy of the Church of St. Augustine, belongs to a spiritual and moral world which is above the order of the material world ; and what makes its dignity, what constitutes its " personality," is exactly its supreme independence not only of States and Money and fleeting Opinions, but—in the last analysis—of all that fleeting imagery and the world of phenomena can offer it. " The sons of God," says the great philosopher of that Church, " are led by the Spirit of God, not like slaves, but like free men." The law that differentiates order from chaos is a condition of freedom. Even the traffic in a city

is free to move only so long as it follows the external and rational law of its freedom. Break that law and confusion follows. And, in that higher philosophy of the Celestial City, "the Spirit, by love, causes the will to lean wholly towards that very thing which is in line with its deepest desire," a desire that is more than individual, because, proceeding from Reason, it is one with the Reason of the Universe, the eternal Logos, making the creature one with the Creator, and man with God. This is why Aquinas asserts that the intelligence is nobler and higher than the will. It is too often forgotten that the Church that built all our cathedrals—Canterbury and York and Winchester and Durham—built up a philosophical structure even more majestic in the intellectual sphere.

With French lucidity Maritain reveals once more the organic unity of that sublime philosophy. It is the only philosophy that offers an adequate interpretation of the full relation of man to the universe and to God. It has stood and developed for nineteen hundred years; developed, not changed, as an acorn develops into an oak, or a child into a man. All arts, all sciences, all philosophies have contributed to it. Reject its gargoyles, if you have so little of the historic sense as

to be uninterested in them ; but its pinnacles soar over the loftiest systems of to-day as our Abbey soars above a passing bus. One thing is quite certain, the fashions, the new moralities, the intellectualisms, the sciences of to-day will inevitably perish and give place to others, for their own hour ; but this will stand *in saecula saeculorum*. It will stand because it is the only shrine on earth of the last certainty of the soul. There is none other in the world to-day that contains a single definite certitude on any subject, whether it be of right and wrong, or the true end of man, or the existence of God. When Luther declared that, in spiritual things, Reason was the " whore of the devil," he hardly realised for what harvest he was sowing. There is an irony in the fact that the war against Reason is always attributed in England to the Church that has made the most sublime claim for the human reason. The house divided against itself will inevitably fall. When human reason declares war on Reason, we get the modern chaos of opinion, and eventually the return, through " instinct," to Paganism. The wheel swings full circle, and the old battle begins again. But this other majestic cathedral of the intellect will stand *in saecula saeculorum*, because it believes in an absolute external truth, not subject even to the

" new morality." It believes in the absolute external authority of its own Creator, not as revealed to individual " intuition " or caprice (though intuitions have their place and degree), but as revealed by Reason, and by the eternal Logos of the universe, physical and super-physical. It derives eternal inward strength from that indwelling Power which is not itself, and from that one and only abiding Authority, " whose service is perfect freedom."

THE REAL SECRET OF SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

Is it possible, after all that has been written, to clarify the confused problem of Shakespeare's Sonnets? I believe that it is, not through the romantic methods of the academic editors, or the somewhat awe-stricken and carefully guarded assumptions of the modern decadents, but by a closer attention to the methods of the artist himself in his own work. In one way or another every poet—and Shakespeare is no exception—admits the reader into his workshop; and it is just here that the academic investigator usually goes astray, for he is usually unable to discern what is happening around him.

A preliminary quotation will illustrate my meaning; and if the reader will follow it carefully he will observe that it is not quite what it seems:

"From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
But as the riper should by time decrease
His tender heir might bear his memory:
But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,

Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.
Upon the earth's increase why should'st thou feed
Unless the earth with thy increase be fed ?
By law of nature thou art bound to breed
That thine may live when thou thyself art dead ;
And so, in spite of death thou dost survive
In that thy likeness still is left alive."

The sonnet is closely knit, more closely even than usual ; for not only the idea, but the phrases—the " increase " and the " feeding "—are continued into the sestet. But Shakespeare did not write it in that form, and the reader will not find that sonnet in his works. The first two quatrains are from the first of the series of sonnets which were addressed to a hypothetical friend as persuasions to marry. The third quatrain and the clinching couplet form the twenty-ninth stanza of " Venus and Adonis." There is far more here than the fact that both " Venus and Adonis " and the early sonnets are in the same early " manner." The plea is the same ; the phrasing the same ; the emotion the same. The fragments fit like pieces cut from the canvas of a single picture. And there is considerably more than this to be said. At the first glance around this poet's workshop or studio one discovers another piece of work detached from its place among the later sonnets, which it seems that the academic investigators

have overlooked. I shall deal with this presently ; but first, coming out of the workshop again and closing the door behind us for a moment, we may look at what has been happening outside, among those who have adopted other methods of investigation. For this purpose the new edition of the Sonnets, issued by the Cambridge University Press under the editorship of Professor Tucker, is perhaps the best and most complete of its kind. The notes and introduction are almost always admirable ; and the book gives a full account of most of the arguments that have been used by the various seekers after what may be called biographical and autobiographical indications of an external sort. But even here, with the door closed, it ought to be remembered that all this is useless unless it be made contributory to appreciation of the poetic values in the sonnets themselves. In these there are roughly eighteen thousand words. In this volume alone there are nearly one hundred and twenty thousand ; and, valuable as the student will find them for reference, he should not be diverted too far from what Shakespeare himself would have regarded as the substance of the whole matter.

" How with this rage shall beauty find a plea
Whose action is no stronger than a flower ? "

Most of the tons of paper and print that have accumulated round the sonnets have been devoted to the discussion of a matter which, on the evidence available, is utterly insoluble.

Professor Tucker happens to be a partisan of the William Herbert explanation ; but it must be said that he states the evidence for and against all parties with great justice. My only criticism is that the evidence is not given in a logical order ; and the right conclusion therefore is never allowed to emerge with the clearness that might actually be given to it—this conclusion being that, on the evidence available, the questions asked are utterly unanswerable.

The irony of the matter, in considering the immense waste of argument in many former volumes, is that it all had for its object a closer knowledge of Shakespeare the man ; and that this very knowledge is obtainable to a much greater degree in another way. If a thousandth part of the wasted energy had been expended on the artistic appreciation of the work itself, simply as poetry, we should begin to understand the mind and spirit of Shakespeare, the man, far better than by any other means. The beauty of two lines—

> " The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,
> Though to itself it only live and die "—

tells us more of Shakespeare than can be extracted from all the fallacious attempts to identify "Mr. W. H." and the "Dark Lady." Moreover a closer attention to the technical side of the work itself, I believe, will be far more likely to illuminate even the question of the provenance of the sonnets. But before we reopen the door of the workshop it may be well to indicate one or two logical chasms into which enormous masses of the other kind of argument may be tumbled immediately.

A great part of the discussion has been concentrated on the dedication of the sonnets to a "Mr. W. H." This very dedication (unlike the dedications of "Venus and Adonis" and the "Rape of Lucrece," which bore the signature of Shakespeare himself) was prefixed by one of a somewhat piratical crew of Elizabethan stationers (Thomas Thorpe), and it was signed with his initials ("T. T."). The book was not collected, arranged, or issued under the supervision of Shakespeare. It was collected by Mr. Thorpe, with small regard to textual accuracy and not over-scrupulous regard even to the authorship of some of the sonnets included. He collected them, therefore, in very much the same spirit as Mr. Jaggard who, in a more flagrant instance, compiled "The Passionate Pilgrim" and gave the

name of Shakespeare to the work of other hands. His motive undoubtedly was profit ; and he had an eye to his public. All these facts are known separately ; but they have not been properly arranged in logical order, and one or two important implications therefore have not been realised. The most important of these is that, if the identity of Mr. Thorpe's dedicatee were discovered to-morrow, we should be no nearer to the mind of Shakespeare on the matter, and there would still be room for a further avalanche of volumes on this new basis. But even this identity is not likely to be discovered, for several good reasons.

The sonnets being arbitrarily arranged by Mr. Thorpe, and Mr. Thorpe having an eye to his public, it is reasonable to suppose that he would desire the new volume to follow up the success of " Venus and Adonis " and " Lucrece," and that to the best of his ability he would link the volume on to these as their successor and as a poetical story, even if a shadowy one. Some of the phrases in the dedication are therefore borrowed directly from the dedication to the " Rape of Lucrece " and vaguely refer back to it. The common convention of the contemporary sonnet-series was to invent a romantic passion and

dedicate it to a personage, and as the sonnets were arranged to suggest a somewhat intimate personal story (the "story" depends on the arrangement), Mr. Thorpe would certainly feel it prudent not to appropriate the initials of the former dedicatee too directly. And this would account fully for what Professor E. K. Chambers so learnedly called "the process of metathesis," by which he meant merely that "H. W." had been changed to "W. H." "Process of metathesis" was only the Board-of-Education way of saying it. But, alas, poor students! The "process of metathesis" has made it appear of little consequence to the Pembroke party that Mr. William Herbert, their candidate for the place of the "fair man," in historical fact was dark-haired; while those who believe Mary Fitton to be the "Dark Lady" have been able to swallow the fact that she was in real life a striking blonde.

The one kind of transfiguration that does not seem to be fully understood is the way in which the poet transmutes through his art even the suggestions that come to him from facts within his own experience. If a selection of Browning's lyrics could have been arranged by a bookseller in circumstances like those of the sonnets, how striking a story of a "Light Woman" might have

been outlined, and what a flood of light it might have thrown on "Any Wife to Any Husband," or even the "Last Ride Together." This hypothetical case would of course differ from that of the sonnets in some respects; but it is useful at this point as an illustration of the futility of the argument that Shakespeare's sonnets are obviously sincere and therefore autobiographical. For if ever poems bore their sincerity in their faces, those poems of Browning do so; and if ever great poems were, in phrase after phrase, not only derivative but imitative, these sonnets of Shakespeare are both. Their sincerity—and this at their best is indubitable—is the sincerity of all great art, and it is based on the imaginative grasp of realities. But these realities are of a different kind from those required by the historian.

It is just here that additional light may be thrown on the birth of the sonnets by a consideration of the methods of the artist in his own workshop. Reopening that door again, it seems at once indubitable that many of the sonnets were offshoots from the more sustained work of Shakespeare. By "offshoots" I mean that when the poet was engaged upon a long sustained work, there were often occasions when he found himself diverging a little from his main theme, though he

was carried along by the same impulse, as a river might diverge and part round two sides of a temporary obstruction. He sits down to write a quatrain and he writes three, a little off his subject, but too good to lose. There are fragments, single lines, couplets—perhaps better than anything else in his sustained poem, but a little out of proportion. He sets them aside. They can be altered, touched up, finished in another way. The quatrain clinched by a couplet flows naturally into the conclusion of a sonnet. Let me quote again :

" Is thine own heart to thine own face affected ?
Can thy right hand seize love upon thy left ?
Then woo thyself, be of thyself rejected,
Steal thine own freedom and complain on theft.
For having traffic with thyself alone
Thou of thyself thy sweet self dost deceive.
Then how, when nature calls thee to be gone,
What acceptable audit canst thou leave ?
For in thyself thyself art made away,
A mischief worse than civil, home-bred strife,
Or theirs whose desperate hands themselves do slay
Or butcher-sire that reaves his son of life.
Foul-cankering rust the hidden treasure frets,
But gold that's put to use more gold begets."

The sonnet again is unusually closely knit in phrase and idea ; but the first quatrain is the twenty-seventh from " Venus and Adonis " ; the second is from the fourth sonnet ; the third and

the couplet are from " Venus and Adonis " again. But one can imagine Shakespeare pondering whether that last couplet or the one that he actually used in the sonnet would be the better in its original setting :

" Thy unused beauty must be tombed with thee,
Which, used, lives the executor to be."

There are dozens of other passages which can be interchanged or fitted together, as I said earlier, like pieces cut from the same canvas. It is not mere similitude of manner. The sequence of idea and phrase is perfect, even to the play on words. The plea is the same. The emotion is the same. Moreover—and this is a very important point—some of the passages from " Venus and Adonis " show traces of the divergence from the main theme and fit more perfectly into some of the sonnets than they do into their own setting ; for the plea of Shakespeare's " Venus " was not primarily on behalf of posterity. The thought was developed there, and when it reached a certain stage it was cut out as being part of another story. On the other hand there are one or two passages in the sonnets which would fit the earlier poem, but clash with their own setting, though very slightly. The author himself seems to be conscious of this in the fifty-third sonnet, where

he talks of describing Adonis, but carries it off with an air. The hundred and twenty-sixth number of the sonnets is not a sonnet, but a collection of stray clinching couplets from " Venus and Adonis," rather awkwardly fitted together. The phrase about the " lovely boy " comes from the lips of Venus and clashes with the phrasing of the hundred and forty-fourth sonnet. No sensitive ear could fail to recognise the difference in tone between the earlier phrase and

" The better angel is a man right fair."

But there is another of the later sonnets, the provenance of which is so clear that it is difficult to understand how the commentators have overlooked it, even though they remained outside the door of the poet's workshop. In " Venus and Adonis," after Adonis is killed, a purple flower springs from his blood ; and over this flower Venus makes her lament, comparing the smell of it to Adonis's breath :

" She bows her head, the new-sprung flower to smell,
Comparing it to her Adonis' breath. . . ."

and again :

" ' Poor flower,' quoth she, ' this was thy father's guise,
Sweet issue of a more sweet-smelling sire—
For every little grief to wet his eyes ;

To grow on to himself was his desire ;
And so 'tis thine ; but know, it is as good
To wither in my heart as in his blood.' "

The fourth line contains the *motif* of all those sonnets which Shakespeare is supposed to have addressed to Mr. W. H. And this, substituting "she" for "I" in the first line, is how the hundred and nineteenth sonnet begins :

" The forward violet thus did she chide ;
Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells
If not from my love's breath ? The purple pride
Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells
In my love's veins thou hast too grossly dyed."

This last line can only derive its full meaning from the "Venus and Adonis," for the word "grossly" definitely refers to the spilt blood, and has no reference to the later subject. It is the voice of Shakespeare's Venus, not of Shakespeare the man. It will be noted, moreover, that there is a technical flaw in this sonnet. It has fifteen lines. The first line had to be prefixed to couple it with its predecessor and to explain what it was all about—in other words, to take the place of the natural explanation of the "Venus and Adonis" setting, from which it diverged as he wrote it :

" The lily I condemned for thy hand,
And buds of marjoram had stolen thy hair. . . ."

E. K. Chambers, accepting all this as a kind of portrait of Shakespeare's "Mr. W. H.," does actually compare the "buds of marjoram" with the hyacinthine curls of the Greeks. But this does not suggest Adonis to him.

What conclusion is to be drawn from all this? In the first place, the very important conclusion that all the somewhat sickly modern talk about Shakespeare's "lovely friend" and "beloved" and all the rest of it can be blown to the four winds; and that, just as a melody lingers in the mind, so the music of a young poet, who had been working at great length on "Venus and Adonis," was carried on by its own momentum through divergent passages which were sometimes used or completed later in sonnet form, as separate poems.

Their apparent diversion to other occasions needs no other explanation than the sonnetteering convention of the time, the marked influence of Sidney's "Arcadia," and the still more direct and obvious influence of Barne's "Parthenophil," on all this imitative early work. There is no more connection between the sonnet series of "persuasions to marry" (which were simply the appeals of Venus to Adonis, slightly altered) and the later series on the "Dark Lady," than there is between these latter and the dedication to

" Mr. W. H.," who most certainly was not the " onlie begetter " of the sonnets devoted to that lady's black eyes.

Some of these latter are, in their turn, offshoots from " Love's Labour's Lost." They are members of the same family as the sonnets enshrined in that play ; or offshoots of the speech of Biron in the third act, on the wanton with pitch-balls for eyes. It is quite possible that some of these " Dark Lady " sonnets were even composed in connection with the play ; but in any case they are offshoots of the more sustained work. It cannot be said that there was no suggestion from anything in Shakespeare's actual experience ; but it can be said that if the sight of a child drowning a kitten could suggest Lady Macbeth to him—and we have the word of a great imaginative artist for it—it is quite absurd, especially in view of the sonnet conventions of the time, to look for autobiography in this volume dedicated by Thomas Thorpe to Mr. W. H.

A further conclusion simply confirms our earlier certainties about the methods of Mr. Thorpe. The sonnets were collected and arbitrarily arranged to suggest a story, but not by Shakespeare, though Shakespeare may have chuckled at it. Two of them we know appeared earlier in

" The Passionate Pilgrim " ; and many others, far more than is usually recognised, owe their connection with the " story " to nothing more than the fact that they are love sonnets and are included in the volume, at a fairly suitable place. But there is nothing whatever to show that the hundred and nineteenth sonnet, for instance, was not addressed to Shakespeare's own wife. This explanation certainly fits it better than any other ; for any other explanation would make it a piece of nauseating hypocrisy. There are other sonnets of which the same may be said. The sonnet beginning " The expense of spirit " is obviously a pendant to the hundred and second and hundred and third stanzas of the " Rape of Lucrece." The handling of words, the emphasised cæsura, occurring in the same position in line after line, with the extraordinary sequences of sharply marked antitheses, hammering home exactly the same ideas in exactly the same way, constitute no accidental resemblance. The sonnet, in fact, clashes with its own immediate neighbours. Many of the other sonnets are mutually contradictory if they are taken as parts of a " story " and as dedicated to the same person. The contradictions are there plainly enough, not only in such flagrant instances as the seventieth sonnet,

where the escutcheon is praised for its spotlessness immediately after its grime has been explained in detail, but also in such minor conflicts as that between the hundred and twentieth and hundred and thirtieth sonnet. The moods of the artist may change; but not the outlines of the autobiography.

Other sonnets—especially those "promising eternitie" to their friend—are direct imitations of contemporary work, so direct that they might almost be ranked with those rare translations that rise superior to the original. But they are therefore demonstrably art, not autobiography; though, at their greatest, they have all the sincerity of great imaginative art, and lay hold on reality in their own way. A few may have been directly addressed to a particular friend, without being written for him; others may have been given to other friends; but, if so, it was in the manner of the time, and it conformed to a very common convention of the contemporary sonnetteers. Others stand quite alone and are quite detached from any "series." The finest of all, beginning:

> "Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments,"

with the splendid effect of its unstopped first line, and the masterly ease of its technique, has a

universal significance ; and it deals with Love as an Absolute. To look for Mr. W. H. in this would be like looking for a periwinkle that begot the North Sea.

And this really is the conclusion of the whole matter. Limitations of space forbid complete analysis here ; but analysis completely shatters the idea of a connected series, outlining an autobiographical story ; and this result is confirmed by what we actually know of the way in which the sonnets were collected and published.

The result is important ; for while it allows to the greatest of the sonnets an imaginative sincerity that could never characterise the expense of spirit in a waste of shame, it detaches them from a fiction which, if it had any truth in it, would compel any thoughtful reader to echo and deepen the exclamation of Browning : " If so, the less Shakespeare he ! " The later poet who endeavoured to answer Browning missed the deeper significance of his words ; for, even in agreeing with Browning on that point, we may still agree with the earlier poet whom Browning in turn contradicted. With this key, the key of the sonnet, Shakespeare did, in the only sense understood by the poet, unlock his heart. But he did not unlock his autobiography.

THE NUTTER HOUSE

FORTUNATE is the writer who has a background, the poet whose name rises to the lips at the first sight of a lake or a mountain, a seaport or a city. Thomas Hardy is more fortunate in his Wessex than Balzac in the whole of France. Burns is more lucky in his Bonny Doon than Milton in Paradise. Dr. Johnson is happier in Fleet Street (for the name survives all change) than Bunyan in the Celestial City. The radiant spirit of Dickens is alive in the fountain of the Temple, and there is an exquisite spice about the East India Warehouse that keeps the memory of Charles Lamb fragrant for ever.

Across the Atlantic, Mark Twain was hardly less happy on the Mississippi than Emerson in Concord, or Hawthorne in the Old Manse. But perhaps the happiest of all in the New World was the poet, Aldrich, who (even before Tom Sawyer had fluttered the dovecotes of the Fairchild family) struck the first note of youthful rebellion in that delightful classic of New England : " The Story of a Bad Boy."

"The Nutter House," in which the Bad Boy lived and moved and had his being, is a fragrant honeycomb of golden memories; and it stands, as the poet's memorial to-day, in the old seaport town of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, exactly as it stands for hundreds and thousands of readers in the pages of the book.

It is perhaps the most delightful fragment of old New England now in existence. Money for its purchase was raised by popular subscription, and the utmost devotion has been exercised to preserve its minutest details. The visitor looks in the very mirrors that reflected the features of the Bad Boy, and turns the very pages of the books that entranced him on summer afternoons. He may sit in the high-backed chair, studded with brass nails like a coffin, in the Bad Boy's bedroom; and, over the head of the bed, on the two oak shelves, he will see the old battered editions of "Theodore, or the Peruvians," "Robinson Crusoe," an odd volume of "Tristram Shandy," Baxter's "Saints' Rest," "Jack Sheppard," and the famous adventures of Rinaldo Rinaldini.

In the quaint colonial garden the very flowers of the old time blossom year after year; and, indeed, the whole memorial stands, like some old-fashioned flower in an old-world garden, wet

with living dew. It is so little like a memorial in the ordinary sense that the visitor finds it difficult to believe he is not trespassing or that the original inhabitants will not quietly stroll in through the delightful doors. It is impossible here even to suggest the wealth of memories in this delicious fragment of the past. It is a haunted place ; but, with this brief glimpse of the background of the poet's boyhood, it is easier to appreciate the delicate fragrance, and haunting melody, of his verse.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich was, in after life, both as poet and as editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, a very salutary influence in American letters. He had, more than almost any other American writer, that care for the form of his art which, in his own country, at one time, under the influence of Whitman, was so lightly regarded. His attitude towards the same destructive tendency in England was delightfully illustrated by his proposal to "modernise" the "Eve of St. Agnes." The letter in which he makes the suggestion is not only humorous, it is a piece of very real criticism, not without interest for an age which thinks that a seashore may be realistically depicted by plastering real sand upon the canvas :

"St. Hagnes Eve! 'Ow bloomin' chill it was!
The Howl, for all his hulster, was a-cold.
The 'are limped tremblin' through the blarsted grass——"

"I think it might make Keats popular again," he wrote, "poor Keats, who didn't know any better than to write pure English."

Aldrich had, indeed, a very remarkable critical gift which manifested itself not only in his continual search for the *mot juste*, but also in a whole series of poems which may be said to deal with the life of the artist from an almost self-critical point of view. Some of these in their urbanity and lightness of touch have a kinship with the poems of Thackeray; but they are, on the other hand, as Mr. Greenslet has noted in his biography, more truly poetical; and, indeed, the following poem has more affinities with Heine, or the Browning of "Youth and Art":

"A man should live in a garret aloof,
And have few friends, and go poorly clad,
With an old hat stopping the chink in the roof
To keep the Goddess constant and glad.

Of old, when I walked on a rugged way,
And gave much work for but little bread,
The Goddess dwelt with me night and day,
Sat at my table, haunted my bed . . .

Wretched enough was I, sometimes,
Pinched and harassed with vain desires;

But thicker than clover sprang the rhymes
As I dwelt like a sparrow among the spires.

Midnight filled my slumbers with song ;
Music haunted my dreams by day.
Now I listen and wait and long,
But the Delphian airs have died away.

I wonder and wonder how it befell :
Suddenly I had friends in crowds ;
I bade the house-tops a long farewell ;
' Good-bye,' I cried, ' to the stars and clouds ! . . .'

And the woman I loved was now my bride,
And the house I wanted was my own ;
I turned to the Goddess satisfied—
But the Goddess had somehow flown.

Flown, and I fear she will never return ;
I am much too sleek and happy for her,
Whose lovers must hunger and waste and burn
Ere the beautiful heathen heart will stir.

I call—but she does not stoop to my cry ;
I wait—but she lingers, and ah ! so long !
It was not so in the years gone by
When she touched my lips with chrism of song.

For a man should live in a garret aloof,
And have few friends and go poorly clad,
With an old hat stopping the chink in the roof,
To keep the Goddess constant and glad."

In its own kind, that is a perfect piece of writing. Nothing is over-emphasised. It is touched off as lightly as a letter from one friend to another ; and it is of so easy and lucid a grace that the reader hardly realises how very difficult

it is to obtain that straightforward simplicity. It is attained with even greater mastery in that exquisite poen "Thalia." "A middle-aged lyrical poet is supposed to be taking final leave of the Muse of Comedy," the sub-title tells us. "She has brought him his hat and gloves, and is abstractedly picking a thread of gold hair from his coat sleeve as he begins to speak." But there is more true pathos in this brave poem than in all of the whining adjurations "not to weep" that have been addressed by lovers to their ladies with the deliberate intention of drawing tears :

"Before my kisses grow tame,
Before my moodiness grieve you,
While yet my heart is flame
And I all lover, I leave you.

So, in the coming time
When you count the rich years over,
Think of me in my prime,
And not as a white-haired lover,

Fretful, pierced with regret,
The wraith of a dead Desire
Thrumming a cracked spinet
By a slowly dying fire.

When, at last, I am cold—
Years hence, if the gods so will it—
Say, 'he was true as gold,'
And wear a rose in your fillet !

Others, tender as I,
Will come and sue for caresses,
Woo you, win you or die—
Mind you, a rose in your tresses."

The subject-matter of this poem is, in essence, that of the *Untimely Thought*, in the three stanzas of which a very real moment in the life of a man has been caught and set down with strangely vivid power. And it is a very manly power, for the poem gains immensely by the fact that the Untimely Thought is kept, so to speak, locked in silence.

" I wonder what day of the week,
I wonder what month of the year—
Will it be midnight, or morning,
And who will bend over my bier?—

—What a hideous fancy to come
As I wait at the foot of the stair,
While she gives the last touch to her robe,
Or sets the white rose in her hair.

As the carriage rolls down the dark street
The little wife laughs and makes cheer—
But . . . I wonder what day of the week,
I wonder what month of the year."

Aldrich is, indeed, pre-eminently the poet of these strange and ghostly moments, the memories that steal into the mind like a fragrance, the premonitions that touch us from beyond the

grave. Sometimes, the moment is a very vital and terrible one ; as in those two brief stanzas which deal with the death of a child :

> " I think of it in the city streets,
> I dream of it when I rest—
> The violet eyes, the waxen hands,
> And the one white rose on the breast."

Sometimes, as in a poem like " Memory," the touch is so delicate and elusive that it may evade the careless reader ; yet always it is a real touch of a real experience, one of those strange touches of beauty that seem to come from far beyond the world we know :

> " My mind lets go a thousand things,
> Like dates of wars and deaths of kings,
> And yet recalls the very hour—
> 'Twas noon by yonder village tower,
> And on the last blue noon in May—
> The wind came briskly up this way,
> Crisping the brook beside the road ;
> Then, pausing here, set down its load
> Of pine-scents, and shook listlessly
> Two petals, from that wild-rose tree."

It has been well said that this, in its exquisite simplicity, is the art of the Japanese painter who can make a single spray of apple blossom stir the deep heart of man. But its most moving characteristic is its extraordinary truth of feeling.

Indeed, Aldrich is almost the only poet who has recorded quite simply and sincerely, a *true* feeling on such subjects as that of his strange little poem, " Apparitions " :

" At noon of night, and at the night's pale end,
Such things have chanced to me
As one, by day, would scarcely tell a friend
For fear of mockery.

Shadows, you say, mirages of the brain !
I know not, faith, not I.
Is it more strange the dead should walk again
Than that the quick should die."

Something of the same haunting spell may be discerned in the more restrained lines on the grave of his friend, Edwin Booth, lines which might have been written by one of the great Elizabethans :

" In narrow space, with Booth, lie housed in death,
Iago, Hamlet, Shylock, Lear, Macbeth.
If still they seem to walk the painted scene,
'Tis but the ghosts of those that once have been."

And the lines written for Sargent's portrait of Booth are alive with haunting memories. It is these " Crowding Memories " that have now been embodied in the volume bearing that title by Mrs. Aldrich, which was published a year or two ago in America. Concerning the friendship

of Aldrich with Edwin Booth, this volume contains some extraordinarily interesting and hitherto unpublished material. It not only throws a new light on the history of Edwin Booth, but gives a very vivid picture of the tragic days that followed the murder of Lincoln by John Wilkes Booth, the unbalanced brother of the great actor.

"In the sad days following this homecoming, Mr. Aldrich was Mr. Booth's constant companion, a vigil that was not without threatening danger, as daily letters, notes, and messages came to the house addressed to Mr. Booth warning him that the name of Booth should be exterminated and that none should bear it and live. Bullets were marked for him and his household. His house would be burnt.

"Through the long hours of those days and nights Booth sat in almost frozen silence. There was but one ray of hope in that desolate household—the hope that John Wilkes might not live to be hanged."

Later in the volume we get a curious illustration of the ameliorating influence of time. Edwin Booth writes :

"Mr. Sargent called to say that he had word from the Art Committee to paint my portrait for the club . . . when I told Aldrich, he advised me to buy at once a piece of sand-paper and, inside locked doors to sand-paper my soul, for I might be assured that in this presentment of myself, all secret sins, or thoughts, would be dragged squirming to the light."

But Edwin Booth was able to stand the test ; for

those who have not seen Sargent's portrait of Edwin Booth at the Players' Club may take the lines by Thomas Bailey Aldrich as a very just translation of it into verse :

" That face which no man ever saw
And from his memory banished quite,
With eyes in which are Hamlet's awe
And Cardinal Richelieu's subtle light,
Looks from this frame. A master's hand
Has set the master-player here,
In the fair temple that he planned
Not for himself. To us most dear
This image of him ! ' It was thus
He looked ; such pallor touched his cheek ;
With that same grace he greeted us—
Nay, 'tis the man, could it but speak ! '
Sad words that shall be said some day—
Far fall the day ! O cruel Time,
Whose breath sweeps mortal things away,
Spare long this image of his prime,
That others, standing in the place
Where, save as ghosts, we come no more,
May know that sweet majestic face
The gentle Prince of Players wore !

The pictures of the life of Old Boston with which this delightful book abounds have a charm that is rare in autobiography. They have something of the mellow flavour of Cranford ; but it is a Cranford on a very much larger scale, of course, an epic Cranford ; and the characters range from Charles Dickens (of whose visit to Boston we get delicious glimpses), to Oliver

Wendell Holmes and Mark Twain. We overhear Mark Twain asserting that he had " quit smoking to please Livy " (Olivia, his wife), and that he would " quit wearing socks if *she* thought them immoral."

We have heard so much of what Dickens thought of America that a pleasanter picture may not inappropriately be quoted. The description is of his visit to the quaint little house where the Aldriches lived in Pinckney Street, Boston.

" If the Sultan of Zanzibar, the Czar of all Russia, the Grand Mogul, and all the crowned heads of Europe combined had knocked at our door, it would not have thrown the entire household into such a frenzy and flutter as that simple card did with its magic name, Mr. Charles Dickens. I well remember the quick beating of my heart as I descended the stairs to find Mr. Dickens seated in the easiest chair in the bay-window. He was dressed—I think dressed is the right word—in a very light, so light that I don't know how to describe it—I can almost say soiled white top-coat. It was wide and short, and stood out like a skirt, the collar of a much darker shade of velvet. His waistcoat was velvet of another shade of brown, with brilliant red indentations. I don't remember what he wore on his feet, but I remember well the laughter and good cheer, the charming way in which the guest made these two young people feel that to him they really were persons of consequence and were so regarded by this prince of strangers who tarried within their gates.

" In those happy days my mainstay was an austere lady who consented to live with us for the modest

sum of five dollars a week, which would include the services of herself and daughter. It is true that this daughter had lived in this great world of ours but six years, but Mrs. Sterling felt that Lizzie was a sufficient grown-up to answer the door-bell and wait at the table, if she, Mrs. Sterling, waited in the pantry to lift the heavy dishes. Lizzie was also an accomplished duster, and also knew cause and effect ; for I remember her assuring me one day, when the fire-bells rang, that she supposed ' someone had been fiddling with kerosene.'

" After a pleasant chat, Mr. Dickens turned to me saying : ' Now I want to see the little maid, I have heard all about her.' So I went on the quest ; and soon the demure little Dutch picture (in a mouse-coloured dress reaching almost to the ground, a long white tire with full bishop sleeves, hair braided on each side of her brow and tied with the same mouse-coloured ribbon in a prim bow) walked in with her silver tray, decanter, and wine-glass.

" Going up to Mr. Dickens, she said with her alluring lisp, ' If you pleathe, thir, will you take a glath of wine and a bithcuit ? '

" Mr. Dickens poured out his glass of wine, and with a courtly bow to us and a lower one to the little maid, drank to our health and happiness ; and when the little maid departed put his head on the cushion of his chair and laughed and laughed. Then turning to me, he said, ' Now I want to see this wonderful house from top to bottom, from cellar to attic.'

" We showed it him with honest pride and he said, in leaving, that nothing in our country had interested him more. We have wondered since if, in telling of his visit to others, he did not say that nothing in our country had amused him more."

Fragmentary quotations of this kind convey

very inadequately the richness and variety of these " crowding memories," or the gaiety with which they are set down. The story of how, all unwittingly, young Mrs. Aldrich plied Harriet Beecher Stowe, on a warm afternoon, with a cooling cup that unfortunately did inebriate, and her desperate attempts to save the distinguished victim from discovery, is a delicious little comedy. More to the point, perhaps, as a conclusion to this chapter, and as an illustration of how we mortals misunderstand one another's motives, is the tale of Aldrich's cold aloofness after the first night's success of his drama " Mercedes." By some oversight he had arrived in New York for this first performance with a somewhat strangely assorted wardrobe. As Mrs. Aldrich says, " At a most important moment in the arrangement of a coiffure, words were overheard that in spite of the hot curling iron in the hand sent a chill to the hearer : ' Where are my trousers ? ' . . ."

" Mr. Aldrich was firm that he could not go to the theatre without evening dress, that it was disrespectful to his friends and to his audience. At last the happy compromise was made that he would go to the theatre in his pepper-and-salt trousers, the rest of his body arrayed in evening splendor ; that he should sit in the back of the box, the wraps on a chair making a screen to hide the defection of the conventional make-up. . . .

" At the end of the play there came loud calls for ' Author ! ' ' Author ! ' ' Curtain ! ' ' Curtain ! ' followed by a sharp knock at the box door and the hurried message, ' Mr. Palmer says Mr. Aldrich must come in front of the curtain.' The calls grew louder and louder. . . . In this unfortunate dilemma, Mr. Aldrich, with the chair as a screen between him and his cruel audience, bowed to the right and the left, but this did not satisfy his uncomprehending friends, who called louder and louder, ' Author ! ' ' Author ! ' ' Curtain ! ' ' Curtain ! ' ' Speech ! ' ' Speech ! '

" The next morning's newspapers, in criticism and editorials, said : ' It was much to be regretted that Mr. Aldrich had not spontaneously yielded to the flattering request to come before the curtain instead of coldly bowing at the back of the stage box.' But added, in extenuation of the misdemeanor, ' Perhaps it was the cool conservatism of Boston that restrained him.' "

Happy is the temperament that can meet the biliousness of its contemporaries with so genial a smile, and how very much happier the rest of the world would be if we could all of us always understand that the apparent slights of our friends, in the majority of cases, are due to the fact that they are at least figuratively wearing the wrong trousers.

THE EYE OF DAY

THE poetry of Chaucer has long been in danger of orbing itself into a star. Distance has concentrated it into a small glowing sphere, an evening planet over a fading sunset—or, according to your view of the poet, a morning planet over a lost dawn. We know that it represents a rich and many coloured world. Its characteristics have become legendary, and we illustrate them by stock quotations of one or two lines :

" A verray parfit gentil knyght,"

which incidentally a leading newspaper recently attributed to Spenser.

Closer contact with the planet is left too often to the astronomical scholars, who analyse its composition, and pass its various rays through philological spectroscopes. But it is human life itself that keeps poetry alive ; and there ought to be more readers who are not content to take that work on trust, or to rely on intuitive impressions of its beauty. There are few who actually bury their noses in its wild flowers, listen to the music

of its wild birds, or breathe its April airs as they ought to be breathed if its living poetry is to be appreciated. The language, as Matthew Arnold pointed out, presents less difficulty than the dialect of Burns for the general reader who can escape the pundits.

Critics, searching for the sources of Chaucer, have laid too much stress on the foreign element in him, and on his debt to foreign authors. In spite of the fact that he was considerably nearer to what may be called the "melting-pot" period of England, in which newly arrived elements had not yet been completely assimilated, he borrowed very little more than Spenser from foreign sources. Many of the Elizabethan sonnets are much more literally "translations" of foreign authors than anything in Chaucer. One may even doubt whether Chaucer owed very much more to Boccaccio than Shakespeare owed to Plutarch and others, at second or third hand; and, indeed, if debts are to be assessed, a considerable part of Milton in "Paradise Lost," "Paradise Regained" and "Samson Agonistes" owes its very existence to the Bible. It cannot be emphasised too often that real literature is a tree with branches, leaves and blossoms, not the riot of infinitely repellent

particles which ignoramuses aim at creating to-day. It is a cosmos, not a chaos ; an evolution, not a series of disconnected explosions ; and, though the species to which Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley and Keats belong is national, the genus, which includes every species of poet, is international. With all the greater poets of England, it would be a mistake to merge the genus in the species, and to forget that they belong to a still greater tradition, but it is still true to say, as an inheritor of the European tradition in the New World once said, that Chaucer was the fruit of his native soil. " Nothing more genuine in flavour, more sound in health, did it ever bear. The note of each bird is not more proper to its kind than the genius of Chaucer is the right music of Britain." In the distinction between international *genus* and national *species* we find the reconciliation of the apparent contradiction of those scholars who affirm in one breath that Chaucer was more French than English, and, in the next breath, that he was the very voice of his own country. Many of his tales, and much of his technique, he derived from abroad. He transplanted them, as Shakespeare and Keats transplanted other things ; but, in English soil, and in the English tongue, they acquired a new

quality. In the " Prologue," and the various continuations of it which form the introductions to the " Canterbury Tales," all the England of Chaucer's generation lives again. On the whole, the " Prologue " must be set down as his greatest achievement. Chaucer shines out there, as the happiest of all poets on record in the unjaded gusto with which he enjoys all the variety and colour of human life, and floods everything with April sunbeams and showers ; but he also proves himself to be the forerunner of the great humorous stories in Shakespeare. His host reminds us of the Shakespeare who saw a man laugh till his face was " like a wet cloak ill-laid up " ; and his miller, whose mouth was like a great furnace, reminds us of the Shakespeare who compared a flea on Bardolph's nose to " a black soul burning in hell fire."

The Tales themselves were obviously, at times, a task to their author. He grows tired, and, when he is tired, the reader begins to lose interest. But in the " Prologue " Chaucer is radiantly enjoying his own craft, with a whimsical delight in the characters he depicts. It is not only Shakespeare that he anticipates in that wonderful gallery of English portraits. His monk, a manly man, " to ben an abbot able," whose bridle men might

hear as he rode, jingling in a whistling-wind " as clear and loud as doth the chapel bell," is after the very heart of Walter Scott ; and the Wife of Bath has descendants not only in those merry ones of Windsor, but in Smollett, and even in some of the stout matrons of Dickens, though in the last case a smoky London has robbed them of their colours, or made them blowzy. They have come down in the world, too, for the Wife of Bath had seen cities of men and nations.

It is doubtful whether living characters have ever been depicted more vividly than some of these in the comparatively short space of " The Prologue." The Wife of Bath is drawn at greater length than most, and with a more lavish use of colour ; but it is a picture worthy of Rubens. She rides before us in her scarlet hose, with a hat as broad as a buckler or a targe, and the broad smile of her bold, fair, rosy face robs even her coarseness of what would be offence in others. She is as coarse as a farmyard, and as healthy ; and, if some of our slimier moderns would like to know the difference between the healthy animal and the unhealthy, they cannot do better than study this magnificent portrait, and the glorious part played in it by the broad clear sunlight of humour.

The picture of the Prioress is equally perfect ; and she lives for us to-day as vividly as for her own generation. The grey eyes ; the small, soft, red mouth ; the coy, simple smile ; the little airs and graces ; her French, entuned through her neat little nose,

> " After the scole of Stratford-atte-Bowe,
> For Frenssh of Paris was to hire unknowe,"

and the elegance of her table manners :

> " Her over-lippe wyped she so clene,"

are all brought before us to the very life. We see her raising an elegant little hand to her mouth to disguise the faint hiccup :

> " Full semely after her mete she raughte."

The ludicrous concentration of some of the scholars on " sources " has misled even Hazlitt into suggesting that Chaucer got these details from contemporary books of etiquette ! But such things are not found in books. We see the tears coming into her eyes at the sight of the trapped mouse, for :

> " All was conscience and tender heart."

And there was a mind also—a fair forehead, almost a span broad ; and with it all, a genuine

love of the dainty and decorative in her attire, as attested by her graceful cloak ; her beads of coral, " gauded all with green " ; and the golden brooch.

> " On which there was first write a crownéd A,
> And after *Amor vincit omnia.*"

In all these pictures and portraits there is a glorious objectivity and impartiality. These characters are not pale reflections of Chaucer's own thoughts. He is interested in the world around him, and in other human beings than himself, as all great poets must be, and as no minor poets really are ; and, in accordance with this objective attitude, he paints the passing pageant with the love of colour which characterises the great old masters. " Death to the optic nerve " is all very well as a slogan for the anæmic art of a world grown grey in self-analysis ; but Chaucer knew that eyes are for seeing with, and ears for hearing with, and that music and colour are not to be despised ; for the invisible and inaudible things of the Eternal are to be discerned by the aid of the audible and visible ; and the master-key on earth to all great art and religion is to be found, not in the Word alone, but in the Word Incarnate, the Word made Flesh. He is not fooled by the human weakness of its

ministers. He is quite ready to paint you a wicked Friar; but, over against this picture it must be remembered that he gives you that other, of a good "man of religion" who, like Goldsmith's Chaucerian figure, "passing rich on forty pounds a year"

> "Koude in litel thing have suffisaunce.
> Ne maked him a spicèd conscience.
> But Criste's loore, and his Apostles twelve
> He taughte, but first he followed it hymselve."

It is in such character-painting, and in the delicious sparkle of his bird-haunted country air that the poetry of Chaucer is to be found. The "great line" test does not apply to him. One of the most famous of English critics found a Keatsian neo-romantic quality in the second of the following lines:

> "Now with his love, now in the colde grave,
> Allone withouten any compaignye."

But it is difficult to be sure of those elusive qualities in the work of a poet so remote, and modern readers are likely to deceive themselves by reading their own modern feeling into the lines.

One certainly hesitates before accepting the serious praise of that line when one finds that line repeated by Chaucer, syllable for syllable, in the

very different context of the Miller's scurrilous tale of Hende Nicholas, who also, at the beginning, was

"Allone, withouten any compaignye."

If that line does contain all the subtle harmonies of thought and poignant feeling attributed to it by the famous and learned critic in the first instance, it is the only great line in all literature that has proved flexible enough to be used by its author, syllable for syllable, in so different a context, for so different a purpose, and with so different a content. Poets do sometimes repeat their best lines ; but we do not meet the best lines of "Hamlet" in Falstaff's tavern. And the same tion arises with regard to the famous "pitee renneth soone in gentil herte" of the Squire's Tale. The words are used in the Merchant's Tale, in a very different context. Is it not possible that our lack of familiarity with Chaucer's language allows us to lend something of our own to a phrase that could be repeated as a whole, with so different an inflection, in another context? Is it not a blank cheque that we ourselves fill up for any sum we fancy? And may not the day come when Tennyson's worst lines in the May-Queen, read by posterity as we should read an ancient :

" Gif ye're wakynge, calle me erly,
Calle me erly, mooder dere,"

will seem to be transfused with a rich glow that they hardly possess for contemporaries?

We may prefer the delicate touch, not dependent on the mere phrasing of a line which William Morris noted in his beautiful tribute to Chaucer, the " dreamy flush that came into Criseyde's face as Troilus rode up the praising street." But, even so, the " blush," as evoked by Chaucer, is of an uncertain quality. In the " Parlement of Foules " he makes two well-feathered birds blush. One of them, usually of a demure brown, blushes " right as the fresshe, rede rose new." There is some excuse for the other bird, a turtle, since she has been listening to the talk of a goose ; but, on the whole, I would not attach my faith in Chaucer's poetry to these delicacies. William Morris made him too much of a post-Keatsian. Returning to Chaucer himself from his modern " Pre-Raphaelite " worshippers is like coming out of a heavily tapestried room into a great laughing meadow. William Morris imputed his own " dreaminess " and brooding melancholy to a poet who was as wide awake as a thrush looking for his breakfast. For Chaucer's delight in the visible world was like that of a child in its un-

spoiled freshness and undimmed clarity. He had nothing of the twilight about him. All was clear-cut and as brightly coloured as his own daisy. And when we see him kneeling in rapture over the flower which he made his own, his little " eye of day," kneeling there to watch it open to the spring dawn :

> " Kneeling alway, till it unclosed was
> Upon the smalé, softé, swoté grass,"

we come nearest to his own simple heart. Of the tales, the " Legende of Good Women," which does not belong to the Pilgrims, contains lovelier poetry than any. He regretted much of the school-boy dirt, in such episodes as the tale told by the Miller ; and in spite of the elderly scholars who wag their musty old beards over these things and regret the regret of Chaucer, he proves himself right. The introduction to the Miller's tale is full of an uneasy sense that it is out of place. He makes the Miller drunk to justify the telling of it, and he forgets his own setting for it. Even in Chaucer's age it could never have been told, as the Miller tells it, in the company of the Prioress and the Nun as Chaucer describes them. Many of these tales in fact were lugged in to fill gaps in the framework. Instances of sheer forgetfulness

as to who is speaking, and instances of sheer inappropriateness in the characters to whom particular tales are attributed, amply demonstrate this. Moreover, in the Miller's tale, the opening description of the characters, and especially of Alison, is so far superior to the tale itself that the whole is thrown out of proportion ; the real richness of the humour is entirely in the setting, and the tale itself comes down with a thump of anti-climax as crude as the fall of the carpenter's own tub. The description of the Miller himself is far more essentially humorous than his tale ; and so, again, we come back to the Prologue as the most substantial part of Chaucer's achievement. Matthew Arnold and Swinburne are right in their assertion that Chaucer definitely falls short of the highest poetry. He never touches the sublime ; he never gives us that deep undertone of the eternal harmonies that we hear in that other Catholic poet of the Middle Ages :

" In la sua voluntade e nostra pace."

He is of the earth, in its coarseness, and in its sweetness. But, even so, he gives us at least the sense of the high-road, leading elsewhere. He is a lover of truth, and in the greatest of his ballades

he tells his fellow-pilgrims that " here is no home, here is but wilderness,"

" Forth, pilgrim, forth ! Forth, beste, out of thy stall,
Know thy contree, look up, thank God of all,
Hold the high way, and let thy ghost thee lead,
And trouthe shall delivere, it is no drede."

It is this " high way " that gives unity to the many-coloured variety of his work. If we had to choose two lines from the " Prologue," we may well think that the most significant of all—for there is a beautiful touch of unconscious symbolism in them—are those lines descriptive of that motley assemblage, at the Tabard in Southwark :

" Of sondry folke, by aventure, y-falle
In felawe-ship, and pilgrims were they all."

Pilgrims were they all, Chaucer included, and even the wicked friar, and the man with his wallet " full of pardons." It is a gracious act of the Muses that they should have set at the head of the long and glorious pageant of English literature this many-coloured company of pilgrims, winding through the lanes of an English April, down to England's noblest shrine.

THE DOMINION OF LITERATURE

If the achievements of mankind are to be measured by the degree in which they have enriched human life, the greatest achievement of all in recent centuries is that whereby the keys of the realm of literature have been delivered to practically every member of the civilised world. We are so accustomed to it that we take it all as part of the ordinary course of nature, and we hardly realise the stupendous significance of the thing accomplished. We talk of the invention of printing, which made it possible on the mechanical side. But we hardly realise all that was involved on the intellectual and spiritual side. Modern philosophers have shown us how the development of language itself is an epitome of the process of evolution. They have passed before us the vast periods of time during which our primitive ancestors gradually evolved forms of articulate speech. We may even imagine for ourselves that strange moment, before the beginnings of history, and yet in some ways the most wonderful moment that this planet has ever known—the moment

when, in the depths of a forest, some uncouth utterance began to express something like a soul, probably when its maker first became acquainted with grief. Close your eyes, and you can see it also—that dark head bowed for the first time into the deeper night, over the body of its mate or its young. There, when the quick, careless cries of its daily life were stopped and broken into something deeper, were born those first shapings of the breath which were one day to be developed into words of supplication and longing, and were to carry the soul of man into those loftier regions which the music of Dante and Shakespeare and Milton has revealed to him.

The distance travelled is so great that—like the distances of astronomy—it baffles thought. How many desperate experiments there must have been, in early days, before any satisfactory communication of ideas could be established ; and, even when primitive literary methods were devised, how long was their development, how bitter, too, was the struggle for freedom in the use of those methods, and how dependent that freedom is, even to-day, on an elaborate system of law, and the orderly working of the civilised world.

But, beyond all this, what a vast amount of

quiet, invisible constant educational work is demanded merely for the elementary task of equipping each separate individual throughout the civilised world with power to pass through even the first gate to this great realm of literature.

And what does the full freedom of this realm mean? Those who would undervalue our literary heritage, which is the most precious possession and chief glory of the English-speaking world, seem often to suppose that it means death and burial under masses of dusty and worm-eaten paper. It means exactly the opposite. The paper is only important because of the vital messages that have been printed upon it; and many of those messages are directed to us across the ages more certainly and with greater urgency than any letter that we may receive by to-day's post. Some of them have the pathos of a message long-lost and now washed up by the sea, to tell us how a great ship went down, and to tell us where we are to mark a certain reef upon our charts. Others come with a more majestic authority and a more instant splendour :—

> "So long as men can breathe and eyes can see,
> So long lives this, and this gives life to thee."

The words meant less in the moment of their utterance than they mean to-day; for, at that

time, their author was an obscure poet—whom a lesser writer of the time could describe as a Jackdaw tricked out with borrowed feathers—and today this same Jackdaw is acknowledged—not so much by England as by the whole of the rest of the world—to be the central figure and uncrowned king of all the English-speaking peoples. Our intellectual world revolves around him as the planets move around the sun. More than any other poet he is our remembrancer ; and this is to fulfil perhaps the chief function of literature. Loss of memory is as disastrous to a nation or commonwealth of nations as it is to an individual ; and our possession of the realms of literature means that we share the universal memory of mankind. It means that for us, henceforward, Time and Space are annihilated by an infinitely more potent agency than wireless telegraphy ; and that we enter into communion with the most vital thoughts of those who are living and working in distant countries. It means that, if we desire to do so, we may hear, and overhear, and confirm, and continue, the hopes, and prayers, and aspirations of distant ages. It means that we have all their experience added to our own ; that we have standards of comparison whereby we may test our own attempts at progress ; that we have signs

to save us from the mistakes of our predecessors and that we have warnings which may help us to detect and repair in good time the first beginnings of our own decadence. But it means, or should mean, far more even than this. It not only gives to each of us the ability to see through the eyes of others, but it imparts to us all something of that divine power which—if we fully understood it—might give us the clue to our own existence and the mystery of the whole creation. It gives us something of the joy of the creative imagination, the power to live in the lives of those creatures of literature that are often so much more real than the men and women around us ; the power to tilt with Don Quixote at wind-mills ; to hear Touchstone singing in praise of youth and love ; or to find—as Dickens found—romance and humour and generous human feeling in what were apparently the most commonplace figures of this fog-bound city of modern London. In all these ways literature deepens our own insight and adds almost immeasurably to the sum of human affection. A commonwealth of nations possessing that insight and based on that affection would be possessed of inalienable wealth, and bound by the only imperishable ties.

But our literary heritage means even more than

this ; for, as the centuries roll on, and this little solar system of ours goes spinning its million miles a day through immensity, the wonder of our existence deepens and deepens. All the achievements of our science are less than the flutterings of a gnat in the eternal silence that surrounds our questioning. And yet we cannot cease to question. We cannot cease to ask those simplest and profoundest questions of all—why should there be anything in existence ? And how came we here ? Science has no shadow of an explanation. We only know that nothingness would require no explanation ; that nothingness is the only logical possibility ; and that, since a world exists, no merely scientific explanation is possible or conceivable. A grain of sand in existence is—to the reason—an impossibility that has somehow happened, a stupendous miracle, before which the lips of Science are dumb. She has ceased to question that ultimate mystery. But Poetry has not ceased to question it ; for the spirit of man has not ceased, nor will it ever cease, while death continues to separate him from those he loves. If ever he should cease, or allow the glitter and chatter and hurry of modern life to carry him along unquestioning and forgetful of the deeper mysteries of his existence, then the

gates of his own true life close upon him inexorably ; and sooner or later his literature, his art and his empire end, or pass into other hands. For on that eternal realm the very life of his spirit depends, whether he approach the mystery by the primitive way of superstition, or that of faith, or that of clear and profound vision. Realise it he must, or he ceases to believe in real values. Life becomes a cheating dream ; truth becomes a matter of policy and is delivered to the cynic ; and—all history declares that, when cynicism overtakes a nation, it is on its way to death.

But, in the great dominion of literature, which outlives nations and empires, the questionings of that deep realm are alive for ever, like the steady flames upon an eternal altar. They have not been unanswered as it is so often and so carelessly affirmed ; for we who ask and ask are not essentially exiled from the ultimate Reality which we desire to apprehend. We are a part of it, and we share its mystery. Those who earnestly question it are answered by their own spiritual growth ; to seek is to find, even though they be intellectually unaware of their discovery ; and the fact may be demonstrated by a comparison of their spiritual stature with that of the unquestioning materialists who sleep and feed and die among the surfaces of

things. Of all this also literature is a perpetual remembrance.

> " Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God who is our home."

Continually in that realm these great chords of music reach us ; and, even when the clouds have overcome the soul, there is a great companionship. Shakespeare is at our side in the darkest regions that the human mind can traverse, and, while he leads us to those lonely ramparts over the sea where that tragic figure in his sable cloak asks those eternal questions, he also points with his own hand to an ever-fixéd mark, a star whose worth's unknown although his height be taken. The master-poets of other peoples are at one with our own in that universal realm. We may follow the footsteps of Milton or Dante or Shelley up to the same summits, and find them dark only " with excess of bright." We may catch there, even amidst our modern agnosticism, glimpses of a loftier world, in which our doubts and questions are resolved ; glimpses of

> " That Light whose smile kindles the universe ;
> That Beauty in which all things work and move."

Only fleeting glimpses, perhaps ; and yet, for

those who have once truly experienced them, there is an end of all the small cleverness, and the little æsthetic snobberies of the hour ; an end, too, of all those mean little envies which sometimes lead the camp-followers of literature into so many distortions of the truth, so much miserable hatred, so much malicious back-biting. You cannot fail to encounter the work of some of these unfortunate beings if you read the literary columns of some of our journals, even some of those that once had a high reputation, for editors cannot verify and check everything, and half the lying in the world is done furtively by amiable suggestion. But such dishonest work is ephemeral. It cannot in present circumstances interest honest men ; and it is quite outside the realm of literature. It is in that abiding realm, not in the literary politics of this hour, that we may find truth and guidance and power to form our own opinions even on the literature of to-day.

The wisdom that is the chief aim of education cannot be better described than in the words of Dante, in the " Paradiso." " It does not consist in knowing the number of the Powers that move the heavens, or whether in a semicircle a triangle can be drawn, possessing no right angle." Wisdom, he said, is that which the great king desired in

order that he might reign worthily. In our self-governing commonwealth of nations where all men now are claiming their share in rule, is there any gift more profoundly to be desired than that for which the great king prayed of old? Outside the slowly developing Faith and Philosophy of Dante, all temples and shrines have crumbled away. All other liturgies and creeds have lost their hold, prematurely lost their hold, on multitudes who have not yet discovered a deeper centre round which they may gather in reverence. If ever they hear, as that great king heard, the voice of the Eternal saying as of old—*Ask what I shall give thee*, they have little heart to reply, or to believe that an answer is possible. Yet the greatest answer of all is still to be found if, forgetting all our vanities, we could be content with the prayer that proved for Dante the wisdom of that ancient king. . . . "And God said—Ask what I shall give thee." "And the king said, 'Thou hast made Thy servant king, and I am but a little child. Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad.'"

It is only with such a heart that Literature can discover its own authority, and fulfil its destiny as a great instrument of justice on earth like that

which Dante describes in the sixth canto of the "Paradiso"; for in those proud words, too, we may find a "second intention":

"*Let the Ghibellines practise their art under another ensign; for this one he follows ill who would sever it from justice. . . . And let not this new Charles strike it down with his Guelfs, but let him fear the talons, which have stripped the fell from a prouder lion, and let him not think that for his lilies God will change His arms.*"

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